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SIGNIFICANT RULING

U.P. madrasa law is against secularism: HC

NEWS » PAGE 14

'IN STATE OF WAR'

Russia launches strikes on Kyiv

WORLD » PAGE 16

ELECTORAL BOND ISSUE

SC-monitored probe must be held: activists

NEWS » PAGE 13

RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

The dream chasers who got inducted into war

How scores of Indians ended up in battlefield

GROUND ZERO » PAGE 11

ACCIDENT IN BIHAR

Under-construction bridge collapses

NEWS » PAGE 14

'Kejriwal's arrest will galvanise the Opposition'

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Condemning the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the Delhi excise policy case, Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) president Thol. Thirumavalavan on Friday said that it will only galvanise the Opposition Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) in the upcoming Lok Sabha election.

Mr. Thirumavalavan, in an interaction with *The Hindu*, charged that the Delhi Chief Minister's arrest was a "political vendetta" by the BJP.

FULL REPORT » PAGE 9

Arvind Kejriwal sent to ED custody till March 28

Seeking 10-day custody of the Delhi CM, agency describes him as 'kingpin' of excise policy 'scam'; it says Kejriwal directly demanded kickbacks; the proceeds of crime could exceed ₹600 crore

Krishnadas Rajagopal
Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

A court here on Friday remanded Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener Arvind Kejriwal in Enforcement Directorate (ED) custody till March 28, a day after the Central agency arrested him in connection with an excise policy-linked money laundering case.

Special Judge (Prevention of Corruption Act) Kaveri Baweja of the Rouse Avenue Courts asked for Mr. Kejriwal to be produced before her on March 28 at 2 p.m. The six-day remand came on an ED plea seeking his 10-day custody in the case.

"As the Chief Minister of the Delhi government which is run by the AAP, Arvind Kejriwal was the key conspirator in the excise policy scam," submitted Additional Solicitor-General (ASG) S.V. Raju, representing the ED, accusing the Delhi CM of wilfully disobeying the summonses issued to him by the Central agency.

Full support: Delhi Minister Atishi being detained during a protest over Kejriwal's arrest, in New Delhi on Friday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

'Demanded kickbacks'

"The liquor policy was formed so that it would enable the taking of bribes," Mr. Raju said, claiming that Mr. Kejriwal directly demanded kickbacks from a 'South Group' of liquor businessmen, which later secured licences in Delhi.

The ED said that the proceeds of crime could go much beyond the ₹100 crore estimated earlier and exceed ₹600 crore.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 12
AAP TRAP » PAGE 10

SC refuses bail plea of BRS MLC Kavitha

NEW DELHI
The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a plea for bail by Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) MLC K. Kavitha, arrested by the Enforcement Directorate, in connection with the Delhi excise policy case.

» PAGE 12

T.N. Governor Ravi re-inducts Ponmudy

All is well: Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi greets Minister K. Ponmudy after the oath-taking ceremony in Chennai on Friday.

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI/NEW DELHI

A day after the Supreme Court made strong observations against Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi for refusing to re-induct former Minister K. Ponmudy in the State Cabinet, the Governor administered the oath of office and secrecy to the latter at a ceremony in the Raj Bhavan on Friday.

Earlier in the day, the Raj Bhavan announced that the Governor accepted Chief Minister M.K. Stalin's recommendation to re-induct Mr. Ponmudy.

Following the ceremony, Mr. Stalin, in a social media post, thanked the Supreme Court's intervention in the matter. "On behalf of the people of Tamil Nadu, I thank the Hon'ble Supreme Court, the custodian of the Constitution, for its timely intervention and upholding the spirit of the Constitution and saving the democracy," he said.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 12

NEARBY

A do-or-die battle for these Ministers

BENGALURU
With several ruling Congress Ministers in Karnataka having fielded their sons, daughters or relatives in the Lok Sabha election, the pressure is on them to drive the campaign from the front and ensure their victory. » Page 8

Land identified for waste processing parks

BENGALURU
The civic administration has identified three large parcels of land in the western, southern, and northern outskirts of the city to establish integrated waste processing parks.

» Page 7

PROPERTYPLUS » 6 PAGES

BJP, BJD to go solo in Odisha as talks fail

The Hindu Bureau
BHUBANESWAR/NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) have decided to go solo in Odisha for the upcoming Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, ending speculation about the revival of their alliance.

BJP insiders attributed the development, which comes after 17 days of talks back and forth between New Delhi and Bhubaneswar, to concerns over the BJD's internal succession plan.

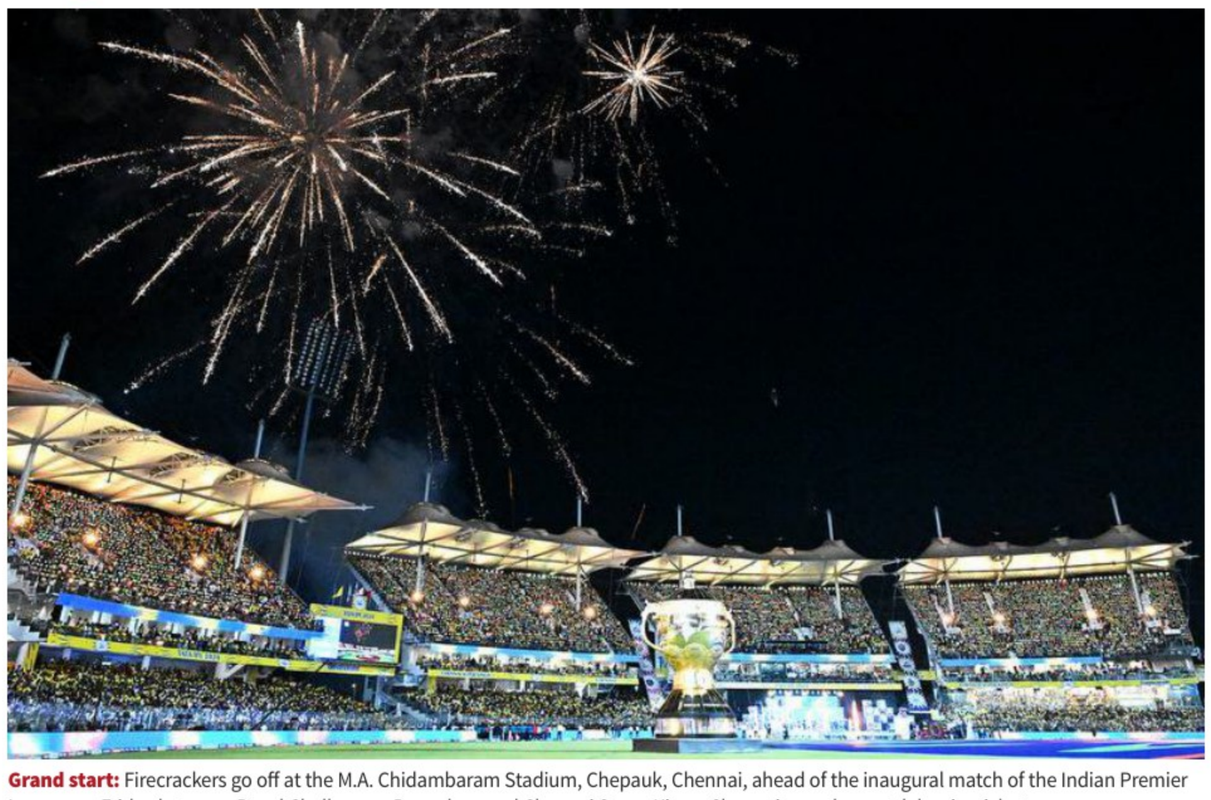
Announcing the decision, BJP State president Manmohan Samal said the party would independently contest across all 21 Lok Sabha and 147 Assembly seats in the State. He added that the welfare schemes of the Narendra Modi-led Union government were not reaching people in the State.

Narendra Modi and Naveen Patnaik. FILE PHOTO

The BJD, however, vowed to win three-fourths of the seats on its own, invoking the "spirit of cooperative federalism".

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 12

IPL fever



Grand start: Firecrackers go off at the M.A. Chidambaram Stadium, Chepauk, Chennai, ahead of the inaugural match of the Indian Premier League on Friday between Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Chennai Super Kings. Chennai won the match by six wickets.
B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM (ANOTHER PHOTO, REPORT, PAGE 17)

Board exams for classes 5, 8, and 9 to resume on Monday

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

After much uncertainty, the board exams (Summative Assessment-2) for students of classes 5, 8, and 9 will resume on Monday.

This follows the Division Bench of the High Court of Karnataka upholding on Friday the State government's decision to conduct the board exams for classes 5, 8, and 9 and take up evaluation for class 11 for the academic year 2023-24.

The Bench directed the government to continue the exams for the remaining subjects for classes 5, 8, and 9 and resume the process of evaluating answer scripts for class 11.

The Department of School Education and Literacy (DSEL) has already conducted two exams for each class. Now, two exams remain for class 5 and four each for classes 8 and 9.

"The High Court Division Bench has given the green signal to conduct SA-2 for classes 5, 8 and 9, and the halted exams will be continued from Monday," said B.B. Cauvery, Commissioner of the Department of Public Instruction.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 9
HC ALLOWS EXAM » PAGE 5

India to double assistance to Bhutan to ₹10,000 crore over next five years

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

India has decided to double Bhutan's assistance over the next five years, from ₹5,000 crore in 2019-2024 to ₹10,000 crore for the period till 2029, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in Thimphu on Friday.

Mr. Modi made the announcement after he was awarded Bhutan's highest honour, the 'Order of the Druk Gyalpo', which was announced in 2021, to acknowledge India's role in ensuring "Bhutan's success in managing the COVID-19 pandemic". After meeting Bhutan's Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay, India and Bhutan inked seven agreements on energy, food safety, sports and research, as well as a space collaboration roadmap.

Warm welcome: Prime Minister Narendra Modi greets a large gathering in Thimphu on Friday. ANI

"We will work on new possibilities for connectivity, infrastructure, trade and energy sectors between India and Bhutan," said Mr. Modi, while expressing his gratitude for the award from the Bhutanese King. "We will soon see our initiatives for a new airport for better connectivity, rail links between Kokrajhar-Gelephu and Banarhat-Samtse, and waterways navigation on the Brahmaputra. To strengthen trade infrastructure, we will build integrated check posts," he said.

Mr. Modi's specific mention of India's support to the 'Gelephu Mindfulness City' – which he called a "visionary project" launched by Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck in 2023 – is significant, as it indicates the project would be a beneficiary of India's latest assistance to Bhutan.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 12

Asteroid named after city researcher

This is in recognition of Jayant Murthy's work in NASA New Horizons Science Team

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

International Astronomical Union (IAU) has named an asteroid after Jayant Murthy, who was acting director of the Indian Institute of Astrophysics before his retirement in 2021.

The asteroid 2005 EX296 has been designated as (215884) Jayantmurthy. The announcement was made on March 18 by the IAU through its Working Group on Small Bodies Nomenclature. According to IIA, "This working group is the designated body to provide official names to all asteroids, comets and other small objects in the Solar System. The asteroid (215884) Jayantmurthy was discovered by M.W. Buie at Kitt Peak National Observatory in Arizona, USA, in 2005 and has been named after Prof. Murthy in recognition of his work in the NASA New Horizons Science Team to observe the ultraviolet background radiation in the universe. The asteroid goes around the Sun in an orbit that lies between that of Mars and Jupiter once every 3.3 years."

Jayant Murthy

New Horizons was launched by NASA and flew past Pluto in 2015. It studied it in unprecedented detail and has since gone far beyond.

Prof. Murthy said, "I am thrilled to have an asteroid named after me in connection with my work on the New Horizons team led by Dr. Alan Stern. I am working on the cosmic ultraviolet background, including the extragalactic light from Alice, on New Horizons. This work, to measure the UV background, is best done from far out in the Solar System, where light from the Sun and the interplanetary medium is minimised."

Prof. Murthy joins the ranks of earlier directors of IIA – Prof. M.K. Vainu Bappu and Prof. J.C. Bhatacharyya – who also have asteroids named after them – 2596 Vainu Bappu (1979 KN) and 8348 Bhattacharyya (1988 BX).

Prof. Murthy's primary research interests are the interstellar medium and dust, ultraviolet astronomy, and space missions. He has been an honorary professor at the institute since his retirement.

GETTY IMAGES

Shardul Thakur has attained cult status for his ability to win matches when his team has been pushed to the wall. After a starring role in Mumbai's Ranji Trophy triumph, he is back at his beloved Chennai Super Kings. In this conversation before leaving for Chennai, he talks about his roots, the World Cup heartbreak, constantly having to prove himself and why he does so well under pressure

'Tough situations, tougher conditions – that's what brings the best out of me'

INTERVIEW

Shardul Thakur

Amol Karhadkar

Call him Lord, or call him Beefy
He is quite cool
His first nickname in cricket
After all is the Bull!

One measure of a cult-hero's popularity is the number of nicknames he spawns, and Shardul Thakur has several. Excited to return to the yellow den – with another Ranji title in the bag and a maiden First Class hundred to his name – Shardul offers us a sneak peek into his persona. Excerpts:

What would Shardul Thakur have been had he not been a cricketer?

I have never thought about it, to be honest. Ours was a typical middle-class family but both my parents were sportspersons along with my uncle, so there was a culture of cricket at home. Just like any other child growing up in a small town in India, I used to play cricket in school. Only when I was selected for my school, my father asked me

> To do so well for 10 games and then have that one game – the [World Cup] final – it hurts a lot. That day has been etched in our minds forever. It's a nightmare

what I wanted to become and I told him I want to bat like Sachin Tendulkar. That's what every kid in India felt like back then. Only when I was 19 or 20, these questions crossed my mind. And I couldn't think of anything other than cricket.

So when did it actually occur to you that you had it in you to make it big?

Perhaps only around the time I was picked for the Ranji Trophy. Coming from a small town, all I wanted was some stability in my life, with a 9-to-5 job. Back then, corporate jobs were available in Mumbai for cricketers. I knew that if I did well, an organisation would want to give me a job to play for them. It would help me make ends meet. I was playing for a job, when I started off. It was certainly not easy to travel 110 to 120 km one way to play cricket. I come from a humble background. My father was a farmer. I didn't know anything beyond cricket. Only after some of the coaches who helped me along – especially Dinesh Lad sir and Vilas Godbole sir – and the seniors in the Mumbai dressing room made me realise I had the potential to excel did I realise it.

You have a knack of delivering against the odds. How did you develop and cultivate it?

I think it is in-born but I wasn't aware of it. I had to find it. Perhaps it was sometime during that phase in Covid when I sat down and thought about my game, I discovered that I actually craved challenges. I like to excel in tough situations, tougher conditions. That's what brings the best out of me. I would be ready when I am facing the best of the best. I may not be right up there in terms of skills but in my mind, I am confident of seeing the team through when pushed against the wall.

I think the kind of upbringing I had has a lot to do with it. Travelling from Palghar to south Mumbai to play cricket; waking up at 3.30 a.m. and reaching home not before 8.30 in the night to play one match was challenging as a kid. I could sleep only four to five hours and despite that, I was expected to perform in every department. That made me realise that it was a very tough life. The family didn't have the money to provide me with luxuries. Like no way were they in a position to tell me: here are the car keys and you have a driver, go by car, rest on the way. That my parents had just enough money for my basic cricket equipment and local train tickets was in itself a big deal. It was all hand-to-mouth back then. There have been times that I have lived on one or two vada-pavs through an entire day. I have had that kind of life, taking on different challenges, so the challenges on the field of cricket, I try and relate them to my challenges growing up.

> Until and unless I get a proper chance, five to eight games, I don't think I should be judged on one failure. When I bowl, I am expected to bowl like Bumrah. When I bat, I am expected to do some magic

Do you think that you have to constantly keep proving yourself in international cricket?

Somewhere down the line, yes. If you see, between the 2019 and 2023 ODI World Cups, I was India's highest wicket-taker [among seamers], right? That's a fact. But still I had to prove myself to be selected in the team and if I couldn't do well in an odd game, there were high chances that I would go out. I understand that. Competition is always good but all I am saying is that you should be fair to everyone. Shouldn't be like one fellow has one bad game and he is dropped, whereas another fellow is persisted with despite having two or five bad games.

Anyone can have a bad game but until and unless I get a proper chance, five to eight games, I don't think I should be judged on one failure. When I bowl, I am expected to bowl like Bumrah. When I bat, I am expected to do some magic. I can't do it every time but if I do it four-five times in 10 games, I think that's wonderful. I saw an interview of Rahul Dravid where he said that he failed most of the times when he batted in international cricket and succeeded only in a few, and he is a legend of the game. So why not us? Why am I judged based on one bad game? Everyone is bound to have it. I am not asking for any sympathy, I am asking for my right.

With your personality, was it slightly easier to overcome the World Cup final disappointment?

It's never easy. That day has been etched in our minds forever. It's a nightmare. To do so well for 10 games and then have that one game – the final – it hurts a lot. But what can we do or say about it! There was a lot of cricket straight after that and god has given me the ability to stay focused. Even now, whatever games we have, we just have to try and give our best. It will hurt for years and years, probably all our lives, but at some point, you have to move on. But that doesn't mean you forget about it. Time heals a lot of things in life but this will take years to heal.

What went wrong with Kolkata Knight Riders in IPL 2023?

Nothing. I really enjoyed my time with KKR. This year they wanted some changes, they had their reasons so before putting me back in the auction, [CEO] Venky Mysore called me up and told me: "You are someone who can walk into any team's starting XI, so it really hurts us that we are letting you go." And that's perfectly fine. Sometimes things work out for you, sometimes they don't. That's life. You have to take it in your stride.

Could you have asked for a better team to land in at the auction?

Absolutely not. Extremely fortunate that the Chennai Super Kings yet again went for me. It's a team that's extremely dear to my heart. Whenever I am with CSK, it feels like I am absolutely at home. It's a great opportunity to showcase your time and come back to life.

STACKING UP

ATP Men's Top 15

#	Player	Age	Points	Events
1	Novak Djokovic	36	9,725	18
2	Carlos Alcaraz	20	8,805	18
3	Jannik Sinner	22	8,310	20
4	Daniil Medvedev	28	7,765	19
5	Alexander Zverev	26	5,060	26
6	Andrey Rublev	26	4,970	24
7	Holger Rune	20	3,875	23
8	Casper Ruud	25	3,560	24
9	Hubert Hurkacz	27	3,370	24
10	Alex de Minaur	25	3,300	25
11	Stefanos Tsitsipas	25	3,255	25
12	Grigor Dimitrov	32	2,935	24
13	Taylor Fritz	26	2,935	25
14	Tommy Paul	26	2,430	27
15	Ugo Humbert	25	2,420	29

Top Indians ▶

Sumit Nagal
Rank 97 ▲ 4 spots

Ramkumar Ramanathan
Rank 410 ▼ 1 spot

WTA Women's Top 15

#	Player	Age	Points	Events
1	Iga Swiatek	22	10,715	19
2	Aryna Sabalenka	25	8,195	17
3	Coco Gauff	20	7,150	19
4	Elena Rybakina	24	5,848	19
5	Jessica Pegula	30	5,035	22
6	Ons Jabeur	29	4,118	23
7	Qinwen Zheng	21	4,050	21
8	Marketa Vondrousova	24	4,015	16
9	Maria Sakkari	28	3,825	24
10	Jelena Ostapenko	26	3,493	23
11	Daria Kasatkina	26	3,118	25
12	Karolina Muchova	27	3,060	12
13	Beatriz Haddad Maia	27	2,870	24
14	Jasmine Paolini	28	2,810	29
15	Liudmila Samsonova	25	2,605	24

Top Indians ▶

Ankita Raina
Rank 242 ▼ 17 spots

Sahaja Yamalapalli
Rank 309 ▲ 17 spots

English Premier League Standings

#	Team	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
1	Arsenal	28	20	4	4	70	24	46	64
2	Liverpool	28	19	7	2	65	26	39	64
3	Man. City	28	19	6	3	63	28	35	63
4	Aston Villa	29	17	5	7	60	42	18	56
5	Tottenham	28	16	5	7	59	42	17	53
6	Man. United	28	15	2	11	39	39	0	47
7	West Ham	29	12	8	9	46	50	-4	44
8	Brighton	28	11	9	8	50	44	6	42
9	Wolves	28	12	5	11	42	44	-2	41
10	Newcastle	28	12	4	12	59	48	11	40
11	Chelsea	27	11	6	10	47	45	2	39
12	Fulham	29	11	5	13	43	44	-1	38
13	Bournemouth	28	9	8	11	41	52	-11	35
14	Crystal Palace	28	7	8	13	33	48	-15	29
15	Brentford	29	7	5	17	41	54	-13	26
16	Everton *	28	8	7	13	29	39	-10	25
17	Luton Town	29	5	7	17	42	60	-18	22
18	N. Forest *	29	6	7	16	35	51	-16	21
19	Burnley	29	4	5	20	29	63	-34	17
20	Sheffield	28	3	5	20	24	74	-50	14

* Everton deducted six points and Forest deducted four points following breaches of the PL's Profitability and Sustainability Rules

Italian Serie A Standings

#	Team	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
1	Inter Milan	29	24	4	1	71	14	57	76
2	AC Milan	29	19	5	5	55	33	22	62
3	Juventus	29	17	8	4	44	23	21	59
4	Bologna	29	15	9	5	42	25	17	54
5	Roma	29	15	6	8	55	35	20	51
6	Atalanta	28	14	5	9	51	32	19	47
7	Napoli	29	12	9	8	44	33	11	45
8	Fiorentina	28	12	7	9	41	32	9	43
9	Lazio	29	13	4	12	36	33	3	43
10	Monza	29	11	9	9	32	36	-4	42
11	Torino	29	10	11	8	28	26	2	41
12	Genoa	29	8	10	11	31	36	-5	34
13	Lecce	29	6	10	13	26	45	-19	28
14	Udinese	29	4	15	10	28	44	-16	27
15	Verona	29	6	8	15	26	39	-13	26
16	Cagliari	29	6	8	15	29	50	-21	26
17	Empoli	29	6	7	16	22	43	-21	25
18	Frosinone	29	6	6	17	37	60	-23	24
19	Sassuolo	29	6	5	18	33	56	-23	23
20	Salernitana	29	2	8	19	23	59	-36	14

Spanish LaLiga Standings

#	Team	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
1	Real Madrid	29	22	6	1	64	20	44	72
2	Barcelona	29	19	7	3	60	34	26	64
3	Girona	29	19	5	5	59	34	25	62
4	Athletic Bilbao	29	16	8	5	50	26	24	56
5	Atletico Madrid	29	17	4	8	54	34	20	55
6	Real Sociedad	29	12	10	7	42	31	11	46
7	Real Betis	29	10	12	7	34	33	1	42
8	Valencia	28	11	7	10	32	32	0	40
9	Villarreal	29	10	8	11	47	51	-4	38
10	Getafe	29	9	11	9	37	42	-5	38
11	Las Palmas	29	10	7	12	29	32	-3	37
12	Osasuna	29	10	6	13	33	43	-10	36
13	Alaves	29	8	8	13	26	35	-9	32
14	Real Mallorca	29	6	12	11	25	35	-10	30
15	Rayo Vallecano	29	6	11	12	25	38	-13	29
16	Sevilla	29	6	10	13	36	44	-8	28
17	Celta Vigo	29	6	9	14	32	44	-12	27
18	Cadiz	29	3	13	13	20	40	-20	22
19	Granada	28	2	8	18	30	58	-28	14
20	Almeria	29	1	10	18	28	57	-29	13

German Bundesliga Standings

#	Team	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	PTS
1	Leverkusen	26	22	4	0	66	18	48	70
2	Bayern	26	19	3	4	78	31	47	60
3	Stuttgart	26	18	2	6	60	31	29	56
4	Dortmund	26	14	8	4	53	32	21	50
5	RB Leipzig	26	15	4	7	60	32	28	49
6	E. Frankfurt	26	10	10	6	42	35	7	40
7	FC Augsburg	26	9	8	9	43	42	1	35
8	Hoffenheim	26	9	6	11	44	50	-6	33
9	SC Freiburg	26	9	6	11	36	48	-12	33
10	Werder Bremen	26	8	6	12	35	41	-6	30
11	Heidenheim	26	7	8	11	35	44	-9	29
12	M'gladbach	26	6	10	10	46	50	-4	28
13	Union Berlin	26	8	4	14	25	42	-17	28
14	Wolfsburg	26	6	7	13	31	44	-13	25
15	Bochum	26	5	10	11	30	54	-24	25
16	Mainz	26	3	10	13	22	46	-24	19
17	Cologne	26	3	9	14	20	47	-27	18
18	Darmstadt	26	2	7	17	26	65	-39	13

Test Batting

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Kane Williamson	859	919
2	Joe Root	824	923
3	Babar Azam	768	882
3	Daryl Mitchell	768	804
5	Steve Smith	757	947
6	Rohit Sharma	751	813
7	Dimuth Karunaratne	750	783
8	Yashasvi Jaiswal	740	740
9	Virat Kohli	737	937
10	Harry Brook	735	773

Test Bowling

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	R. Ashwin	870	904
2	Josh Hazlewood	847	864
2	Jasprit Bumrah	847	881
4	Kagiso Rabada	834	902
5	Pat Cummins	820	914
6	Nathan Lyon	801	801
7	Ravindra Jadeja	788	899
8	Prabath Jayasuriya	783	783
9	James Anderson	739	903
10	Shaheen Afridi	733	836

ODI Batting

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Babar Azam	824	898
2	Shubman Gill	801	847
3	Virat Kohli	768	909
4	Harry Tector	746	767
4	Rohit Sharma	746	882
6	Daryl Mitchell	728	750
7	David Warner	723	869
8	Pathum Nissanka	711	728
9	Dawid Malan	707	730
10	Rassie van der Dussen	701	796

ODI Bowling

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Keshav Maharaj	716	741
2	Josh Hazlewood	688	727
3	Adam Zampa	686	695
4	Mohammed Siraj	678	736
5	Jasprit Bumrah	665	838
6	Mohammad Nabi	656	657
7	Shaheen Afridi	650	688
8	Kuldeep Yadav	645	760
9	Trent Boult	643	775
10	Bernard Scholtz	642	642

T20I Batting

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Suryakumar Yadav	861	910
2	Philip Salt	802	802
3	Mohammad Rizwan	800	875
4	Babar Azam	764	896
5	Aiden Markram	755	796
6	Yashasvi Jaiswal	714	739
7	Rilee Rossouw	689	724
8	Finn Allen	686	723
9	Jos Buttler	680	687
10	Reeza Hendricks	660	674

T20I Bowling

#	Player	Rating	Career best
1	Adil Rashid	726	746
2	Wanindu Hasaranga	687	797
3	Akeal Hosein	664	683
4	Axar Patel	660	667
5	Maheesh Theekshana	659	684
5	Ravi Bishnoi	659	699
7	Josh Hazlewood	654	806
7	Tabraiz Shamsi	654	821
9	Mitchell Santner	645	724
9	Rashid Khan	645	816

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A BG-BGE

Record-smasher Gudaf Tsegay dreams of Parisian gold

The Ethiopian runner is a multi-time world champion across a range of distances and the owner of two world records, but she hasn't stood on the top step of an Olympic podium yet. It's an ambition she is determined to fulfil this summer and she is leaving nothing to chance

Reuters
Associated Press

When Elle St. Pierre sprinted past Gudaf Tsegay to win the women's 3,000m at the recent World Athletics Indoor Championships in Glasgow, the American might have inadvertently sown the seeds for something very special.

For, Tsegay – a multi-time world champion with a vast array of medals across a range of distances – has a history of bouncing back from defeat in spectacular fashion. And with the Paris Olympics looming, the Ethiopian is determined to make it a summer to remember.

Outdoor focus

Tsegay has excellent indoor pedigree – she owns a world title and a world record (both in the 1,500m) under a closed roof – but her focus this year is outdoors, something she has made very clear. Ahead of her first appearance of 2024, indoors at the Boston Grand Prix in February, she disarmingly told reporters that she was "not indoor-focused".

> I'm a medallist in the Olympics, not a champion yet. I'm an indoor champion, two-time world champion, but not Olympic champion. It's my dream

"Olympics for an athlete is a very big competition, I'm a medallist in the Olympics, not a champion yet," Tsegay said. "I'm an indoor champion, two-time world champion, but not Olympic champion. So my focus is that. It's my dream."

Despite the emphasis on the Paris Games, Tsegay did triumph in Boston (1,500m) and at her next indoor competition in Lievin (3,000m) before taking silver in Glasgow. "In sport, everything happens, so I accept this result," she said after finishing behind St. Pierre. "I'm not happy but I accept it, it motivates me to do better next time." These are hardly fighting words – Tsegay is too soft-spoken for that – but her rivals would nevertheless have taken note of her unhappiness. For, it was only last year that she had used the pain of defeat as a springboard for a stunning assault on the 5,000m world record.

At the 2023 World Athletics Championships in Budapest, Tsegay won a dramatic women's 10,000 metres – down the home stretch, she pulled up tightly beside leader Sifan Hassan, who stumbled and fell about 20 metres from the finish line – but the euphoria faded a week later.

As the reigning 5,000m world champion, Tsegay was eager to defend her title and make it an extraordinary 5,000-10,000 double in Budapest, but things unravelled. "After the 10,000m, I had some pain under the bottom of my foot," she said. "I think it had something to do with the hot weather. It was very painful even to walk, I could not sleep."

Not at her physical best, the Ethiopian finished 13th – her only defeat in 10 finals in 2023. "I was so mad," Tsegay said. "Training had gone so well and I really wanted to bring two medals back to my people. But life and sport are like this; sometimes you fall down, sometimes you win."

Using anger as fuel

She used the hurt and anger as fuel, showing up at the Eugene Diamond League three weeks later in September with only one thing on her mind: the 5,000m world record. Her coach and husband Hiluf Yihdego, a former Ethiopian athlete, thought Tsegay had it in her. "My coach told me, 'You can still break the [world] record with the fitness you have'," she said.

"So I trained well and before the event I asked the organisers to set the world record pace [on the trackside LED pacing lights]." When Tsegay's pacing request was announced, some observers commented that the conditions were far from ideal: they said most distance records were set in cooler evening conditions and earlier in the season before fatigue sets in.

> I like the 1,500 and 5,000 much more. The 10,000 is not an event where I have a lot of experience, but I feel very special as I managed to add one more world title at a different distance

But Tsegay set a blistering pace from the start, pulled away from her nearest rival with about 800 metres to go and sprinted down the final metres with gritted teeth. The fans at Hayward Field erupted with joy as she broke the tape. She had carved roughly five seconds off the previous 5,000m record of 14:05.20 set by the great Faith Kipyegon.

The new world record of 14:00.21 – more than 38 seconds quicker than her bronze-winning time at the Tokyo Olympics – led Tsegay to say that her next target was running the 5,000 metres in less than 14 minutes. "It was a very short time after the World Championships, so it was hard and a bit of a surprise," she said. "I think I can run under 14 with a lot of focused training and some time between races."

If Tsegay can pull off a sub-14-minute run at the Paris Games, she will step out of the shadows cast by Kipyegon and Hassan, who, between them, have dominated the distances she competes in: the 1,500m, 5,000m and 10,000m. While Tsegay's collection of titles is glittering, Kipyegon and Hassan have won two Olympic gold medals each in addition to multiple world titles. They are two of history's finest; Tsegay wants to add her name to that list.

At 27, she is younger than both Kipyegon (30) and Hassan (31), but she, too, is pursued by younger rivals – including compatriot and 10,000m world record holder Letesenbet Gidey. A Paris triumph is fraught with challenges, but overcoming adversity isn't new to the Ethiopian.

Battling a crisis

When she won her first outdoor world title (5,000m, Eugene 2022), Tsegay was battling a personal crisis. She had not been able to talk to her parents and siblings for months – Tigray, where Tsegay is from, was the epicentre of Ethiopia's bloody civil war and was under a communication blackout.

In December 2021, she and her husband were woken from their sleep by government forces, who took Yihdego away. He was released after a day, but having to deal with such a harrowing experience months before the World Championships would have broken most.

So Tsegay will look forward to Paris 2024 knowing that she has mastered challenges many top athletes will struggle to fathom. The athletic challenge of facing Kipyegon and Hassan, depending on which events each of them runs, will still be considerable, however. Given all three are world class across a range of distances, it will be interesting to see which battles they pick.

"I like the 1,500 and 5,000 much more," said Tsegay when she was asked which distance she prefers. "The 10,000 is not an event where I have a lot of experience, but now I feel very special as I managed to add one more world title at a different distance." Tsegay is set to train at home and compete "at some Diamonds [League]" ahead of the Olympics.

They will offer a sense of how her Paris dream is likely to play out. The one thing you can be certain of is that she will leave no stone unturned in her attempt to fulfil it.

GAME THEORY

Top shot-stoppers in the Premier League

With club football on a brief break, as the international game takes over, it's a good time to look at how often goalkeepers in England's top flight have made saves and kept clean sheets this season.

Goalkeeper	Club	Games	Saves	Saves per game	Clean sheets	Clean sheet%
David Raya	Arsenal	22	32	1.45	9	40.91%
Ederson	Manchester City	27	48	1.78	8	29.63%
Bernd Leno	Fulham	29	105	3.62	8	27.59%
Andre Onana	Manchester Utd	28	103	3.68	8	28.57%
Jordan Pickford	Everton	28	83	2.96	8	28.57%
Alisson	Liverpool	21	55	2.62	7	33.33%
Sam Johnstone	Crystal Palace	20	41	2.05	6	30.00%
Emiliano Martínez	Aston Villa	28	78	2.79	6	21.43%
Neto	Bournemouth	26	93	3.58	6	23.08%
Guglielmo Vicario	Tottenham	28	81	2.89	6	21.43%
Nick Pope	Newcastle Utd	14	39	2.79	5	35.71%
Alphonse Areola	West Ham	26	108	4.15	4	15.38%
Mark Flekken	Brentford	28	90	3.21	4	14.29%
Jose Sa	Wolves	26	79	3.04	4	15.38%
Martin Dubravka	Newcastle Utd	14	58	4.14	3	21.43%
Robert Sanchez	Chelsea	16	52	3.25	3	18.75%
Thomas Kaminski	Luton Town	29	111	3.83	2	6.90%
Dorde Petrovic	Chelsea	12	41	3.42	2	16.67%
Jason Steele	Brighton	15	38	2.53	2	13.33%
James Trafford	Burnley	28	106	3.79	2	7.14%
Matt Turner	Nott'ham Forest	17	52	3.06	2	11.76%
Bart Verbruggen	Brighton	13	35	2.69	2	15.38%
Wes Foderingham	Sheffield Utd	25	106	4.24	1	4.00%

Source: FBref.com | Minimum 10 games played

PICTURE THIS

Sting operation

Sporting events have been interrupted by recalcitrant dogs, renegade snakes, runaway horses, curious giant lizards, even the odd sleepy donkey, and so the recent bee invasion at Indian Wells did not cause surprise; it did, however, cause alarm.

Carlos Alcaraz and Alexander Zverev were forced to leave the court, as play was suspended after swarms of bees attached themselves to the overhead spider camera.

But the tournament had anticipated the contingency: it had a beekeeper on call. The saviour arrived, wearing no protective gear, and vacuumed the bees out of the camera and into a cage.

The beekeeper had to be summoned again when the players, back on court, found a few bees buzzing.

He walked out to applause, sprayed the general area and left, high-fiving the fans.

Why did the bees arrive? The organisers had the answer: "This area, at this time of the year, can be a hotspot for bees, with all the flowers blossoming. In addition, the bees can be attracted to low frequency sound waves, as they feel the vibrations and are attracted to those locations."

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A BG-BGE

BWSSB commandeers all borewells at construction sites of projects of over 20,000 sq.ft. built-up area

The board had assured builders that it would provide them treated water for their needs

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) has issued an order commandeering all borewells at construction sites beyond 20,000 sq.ft. in Bengaluru.

The board had recently issued an order banning the use of potable water – both Cauvery river water and borewell water – for non-essential purposes, including for construction. In a meeting with builders, BWSSB had assured builders in Bengaluru that the board would provide them treated water for their needs.

The board has said that they can provide up to 1,300 MLD water daily.

The board recently banned the use of potable water for non-essential purposes, including for construction. FILE PHOTO

In furtherance of this move, BWSSB has commandeered all borewells at construction sites above 20,000 sq.ft. Water from these borewells will be supplied by the board to parched areas, sources said. The order has not gone down well with builders.

Emergency situation

"In an emergency situation like this, government will have to take some extraordinary measures. We need to cooperate, and we will. But the board needs to ensure that we are also not inconvenienced beyond a point. Construction industry is a high job generating sector. If the sector is severely hit, it may create a labour crisis," said Suresh Hari, Secretary, Confederation of Real Estate Developers Association of India (CREDAI) - Karnataka.

Mr. Hari said, "BWSSB is yet to put in place a foolproof supply chain for treated water to construction sites. These borewells are also sources of drinking water for workers at the site. BWSSB taking them over will create new problems."

Construction sector

According to a builder, "Builders need to go to the source of treated water and fetch it to their site. Many builders do not have tankers, and they are hard to come by even in the market. Tanker dealers are not ready to transport treated water. There are many practical difficulties. Without settling these, if BWSSB takes over our borewells, it will create problems for the construction sector."

Green Star Challenge for hotels and apartments over the next 30 days

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) has announced a "Green Star Challenge" for hotels and apartments over the next 30 days.

Announcing the programme, V. Ram Prasath Manohar, Chairman, BWSSB, said those hotels and restaurants who adopt five principles of water conservation over the next 30 days will be given a Green Star rating. A similar challenge will be announced for apartments as well, he added.

BWSSB has listed five principles of water conservation to be adopted: Adopting technologies that conserve water, to increase the use of treated water, adopt technology to manage borewells, to harvest rainwater and do recharge pits and create awareness

about all these to patrons who visit these establishments. "We will monitor water use by restaurants for the next 30 days. Restaurants who want a green star rating have to report to us after implementing all the five principles, following which our officials will visit the establishment and inspect it. Based on the inspection report, restaurants will be given green star rating," Mr. Manohar said.

Mr. Manohar claimed that the intensity of the water crisis in the core city and other prominent areas has already come down over the past few weeks.

BWSSB officials served notices on two upscale restaurants - that had advertised pool dance and rain dance parties for Holi

"In the beginning days of this crisis, we used to receive around 300 complaints everyday. This has now come down to around 100 a day," he said.

Hotels served notice

BWSSB officials served notices to two upscale restaurants - GK Grand Arena on Mysuru Road and Jayamahal Palace Hotel - who had advertised pool dance and rain dance parties for Holi. Following a visit to these hotels by BWSSB officials, both have now agreed to cancel these events. BWSSB has banned the use of potable water for these events.

'Water scarcity is a reality in India and is expected to worsen'

A woman drinking potable water from a temporary 1,000-litre storage tank installed on the roadside at Bangarappanagar, Rajarajeshwari Nagar zone, in Bengaluru on Friday. K. MURALI KUMAR

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

"The intense water scarcity is a reality in India and it is expected to worsen in the coming years. Water conservation is not just a matter of individual actions; it is a collective responsibility that spans communities, institutions, and nations. Through education, outreach and financial incentives, we can empower individuals, communities and institutions to acquire and develop water efficient habits and technologies. By adopting a culture of conservation through public awareness campaigns, social norms and regulatory frameworks, we can ensure that water conservation becomes a way of life rather than a social responsibility," said Gopal Naik, Jal Jeevan Mission (Chair) and Professor, IIM Bangalore.

National seminar

Amidst the water crisis in Bengaluru, Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) Chair and Office at IIM Bangalore, in collaboration with UNICEF and the Shri Kshetra Dharmasthala Rural Development Project (SKDRDP), organised a national seminar on water conservation on Friday.

The seminar brought together policymakers, researchers, and academicians to discuss water conservation, river, and lake rejuvenation, and ecosystem preservation.

It shed light on initiatives and projects across the region that have achieved a large-scale impact in reviving water bodies, increasing access to clean water, and mobilising community support.

Bridge the gap

Necessitating focused efforts and dialogues on the need for sustainable water preservation strategies, the summit also emphasised interconnected efforts at individual, community, institutional, and national levels to bridge the gap.

Speaking on the need for collective action to tackle the global water crisis, Paulos Workneh, Chief of WASH and Environment, UNICEF India, said, " When we cooperate for water conservation, we create a positive ripple effect - fostering harmony, generating prosperity, and building resilience for shared challenges."

Weekly special train announced

The Hindu Bureau
TIRUCHI

The South-Western Railway will operate weekly special train between Mysuru and Manamadurai via Tiruchi. The Mysuru-Manamadurai special train (06237) will leave Mysuru at 6.35 p.m. and reach Manamadurai at 9.10 a.m. on April 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, May 6, 13, 20 and 27.

The Manamadurai-Mysuru special train (06238) will be operated on April 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, May 7, 14, 21 and 28.

Timings
BENGALURU

SATURDAY, MAR. 23		
RISE	06:22	SET 18:31
RISE	17:11	SET 05:09
SUNDAY, MAR. 24		
RISE	06:21	SET 18:31
RISE	17:55	SET 05:44
MONDAY, MAR. 25		
RISE	06:20	SET 18:31
RISE	18:40	SET 06:17

Bengaluru Weather	max	min
Tumakuru	33	24
Mysuru	34	23
Bengaluru	33	21

Bengaluru Today
33°C A dry weather to continue. Morning will be pleasant with mist and haze. Day will be warm. Night also will be pleasant.

Bengaluru Tomorrow
34°C The weather will be dry. Morning will be pleasant with mist and haze. Day will be warm and uneasy. Night will be pleasant.

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THE HINDU
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HC upholds govt. decision to hold board exams for classes 5, 8, 9, and 11

The Bench directed that stakeholders be consulted before notifying the similar assessment/ exam pattern for the next academic year

FROM THE COURT

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

A Division Bench of the High Court of Karnataka on Friday (March 22) upheld the State government's decision to conduct board exam/ summative assessment-2 for classes 5, 8 and 9 and the final exam for class 11 for the academic year 2023-24 through the Karnataka State Examination and Assessment Board (KSEAB).

Also, the Bench directed the government to continue the exams for the remaining subjects for classes 5, 8, and 9 and resume the process of evaluation of answer scripts of class 11, exams for which were completed even before the single judge's verdict on March 6.

However, the Bench directed the government to consult the stakeholders before notifying the similar assessment/ exam patten for the next academic year.

The Bench comprising Justice K. Somashekar and Justice Rajesh Rai K. passed the order while allowing the appeal filed by the government challenging the single judge's March 6 verdict. The bench has only released the operative portion of its verdict and complete judgement is yet to be released.

Framing of rules
The single judge had quashed the government's October 2023 notifications while terming that major change in examination method could not have been made without framing the rules either under the Right of Children for Free and Compulsory Education Act or under the Karnataka Education Act.

While setting aside the single judge's verdict, the Bench said that the government, being the appropriate authority, has only prescribed guidelines through the notifications issued in October 2023 for conduct of the exams in a new pattern and the examinations conducted through the KSEAB cannot be termed as 'board exam' in its strict sense.

Supreme Court order
The Bench, on March 7, had initially passed an interim order staying the single judge's March 6 verdict and this had allowed the government to commence the exams for classes 5, 8, and 11 through the KSEAB from March 11. However, the Supreme Court on March 12 stayed the interim order of the Bench and this had resulted in halting of examinations midway for classes classes 5, 8 and 9 after holding exams on March 11 and 12.

Hear on merit
As the apex court directed the Bench to hear the appeal on merit, the Bench heard the arguments on the appeal on March 13, 14 and 18, and had reserved its judgement after completion of hearing on March 18.

The Registered Unaided Private Schools' Management Association-Karnataka, Bengaluru, and the Organisation for Unaided Recognised Schools, Bengaluru, who had filed petitions questioning the conduct of examination through the KSEAB instead of continuing school-level examinations, are now knocking the doors of the Supreme Court against the verdict of the Division Bench.

Police recover undocumented tracksuits in a car

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Viveknagar police recovered four bundles of 300 tracksuits without any proper documentation in Vannarpet on Thursday night.

Tracksuits
Local police deputed at an election checkpost were checking all vehicles that passed through and in a car, when they found the tracksuits with no documentation to support the same.

Police have seized both the tracksuits and the car and are investigating further.

Seizures worth ₹5.22 cr. made in last 24 hours

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Election Commission has made seizures worth over ₹5.22 crore in the last 24 hours. With this, the total seizures since March 16, when the model code of conduct (MCC) came into force in Karnataka, have touched ₹36.41 crore. This includes cash, liquor, drugs, and precious metals.

Advertisement

Together we are #Greater Than Stroke

Ischemic stroke, often referred to as a "brain attack," occurs when the blood supply to part of the brain is interrupted or reduced, depriving brain tissue of oxygen and nutrients. A hemorrhagic stroke occurs when a weakened blood vessel ruptures and bleeds into the surrounding brain tissue. This sudden bleeding can cause brain damage and other complications.

In India a person dies of stroke every 4 minutes. In India the incidence has increased 70% over 2 decades with younger patients being affected.

Strokes are a leading cause of disability and death worldwide, creating awareness about symptoms and signs, prevention, and treatment is crucial in tackling the burden of stroke.

Common risk factors for stroke are high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, obesity, smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, physical inactivity, and family history of stroke.

The signs and symptoms of a stroke can vary depending on the type and severity but often include BEFAST:

B- Loss of Balance,

E-Vision disturbances in one or both Eyes,

F - Face drooping,

A - Weakness or numbness in the Arm, face or leg, especially on one side of the body,

S- difficulty Speaking or understanding Speech,

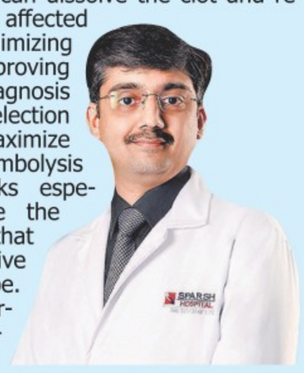
T- Time to call emergency services.

If you observe any of these signs, call for medical help immediately. Immediate evaluation in a stroke ready hospital with scanning of the brain (MRI scan/ CT scan) ensures treatment success and recovery. CT scans and MRI scans can help doctors identify the type of stroke - ischemic or hemorrhagic.

Early recognition of stroke symptoms is pivotal for early treatment.

The two definite ischemic stroke treatment available are clot-busting therapy (Thrombolysis) and Endovasular catheter based removal of clot from blood vessels in the brain(Mechanical thrombectomy)

Thrombolysis, also known as clot-busting therapy, needs to be administered promptly within 4.5 hours of symptom onset. It can dissolve the clot and restore blood flow to the affected area of the brain, minimizing brain damage and improving symptoms. Timely diagnosis and careful patient selection are essential to maximize the benefits of thrombolysis while minimizing risks especially bleeding inside the brain. The more time that passes, the less effective thrombolysis will be. This is why it's important to get to the hospital as quickly as possible when your symptoms start. After thrombolysis, 10% more patients survive and live independently. The sooner you are treated, the better the chances of improvement, and the lower the risk of harm.



"Time is Brain"

Mechanical thrombectomy is a minimally invasive endovascular catheter based procedure used to remove blood clots from arteries in the brain. It's performed to restore blood flow to the affected area and prevent tissue damage. The device can remove clots that are too big to be broken down by clot busting therapy(thrombolysis). Thrombectomy is most effective when performed within six hours after stroke symptoms begin. However the procedure can be done upto 24 hours after the onset of symptoms based on the assessment from Neurologist/Interventional neuroradiologist. It is thought that up to 10% of stroke patients may be eligible for thrombectomy every year.

Further treatment of ischemic stroke involves blood thinners and management of risk factors with regular follow up with the doctor.

In case of brain haemorrhage medications are given to control blood pressure or reduce swelling in the brain. Surgical procedures may be necessary to repair damaged blood vessels, remove blood clots, or relieve pressure on the brain.

Stroke rehabilitation plays a vital role in helping survivors regain lost skills, relearn tasks, and adapt to new limitations. Rehabilitation begins as soon as the patient's medical condition stabilizes.

Protect your future, prevent strokes today!

Reduce your risk with these key steps:

1. Know your numbers: Monitor blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels regularly.

2. Move more, sit less: Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week to keep your heart and brain healthy.

3. Eat smart: Choose a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins to fuel your body and mind.

4. Quit smoking and avoid secondhand smoke to lower your stroke risk.

5. Drink in moderation: Limit alcohol consumption to reduce the risk of high blood pressure and stroke.

6. Stay informed: Learn the signs of stroke and "BEFAST"if you or someone else shows symptoms. Time is brain! Together, we can build a healthier community and a brighter, stroke-free future. Spread the word and take charge of your health today!

Dr. Nikhil C Hiremath
Consultant - Neurologist
Qualification: MBBS, MD (General Medicine), DM (Neurology), Fellowship in Stroke (SCTIMST, Trivandrum) DM(Neurology)

Dr. Srinivas M
Consultant - Neurologist
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Project in pipeline to conserve unprotected temples at Aihole

The authorities have conducted a survey as per which 134 families are living in them since generations and have been identified for relocation and rehabilitation

R. Krishna Kumar
MYSURU

In a move aimed at reclaiming and conserving heritage, there are plans to relocate families living in unprotected monuments and temples in Aihole and rehabilitate them.

This will also help in conservation and protection of the identified monuments which are outside the ambit of either the Archaeological Survey of India or the Department of Archaeology Museums and Heritage (DAMH), Government of Karnataka.

Though the ASI has about 609 protected monuments and the DAMH has about 848 monuments under protection, there are thousands of historically important structures - big and small - that are not protected and are on the verge of being obliterated through change of land use pattern induced by development pressure.

For now, eight temples have been identified for conservation and they belong to the period of Chalukyas of Badami - whose dynasty reigned over vast parts of present day Karnataka and surrounding areas between the 6th and the late 8th century CE. The authorities have conducted a survey as per which 134 families are living in them since generations and have been identified for relocation and rehabilitation.

A portion of an unprotected monument used as a barn to keep livestock, at Aihole.

The families living in these temples lack basic amenities and facilities like power, UGD, toilets, etc., none of which can be provided or extended inside a monument.

Once the rehabilitation exercise is over and the monuments vacated, the restoration part will be taken up by Sri Dharmasthala Manjunatheshwara Dharmothana (SDMD) Trust, which has entered into an MoU with the State government which will foot 50% of the cost while the remaining amount will be put in by SDMD Trust.

In connection with this, about 16 acres of land has also been identified. The cost of land acquisition is pegged at around ₹3 crore to ₹3.5 crore and some of the landowners in the vicinity have come forward to sell land to pave way for the rehabilitation.

The families living in these temples lack basic amenities and facilities like power, UGD, toilets, etc., none of which can be provided or extended inside a monument though illegal powerlines have been drawn for lighting.

N.S. Rangaraju of INTACH Mysuru said some of the temples are being used as cattle sheds and are in bad shape. Also, the relocation plan is hanging fire since years as there is resistance on the nature of rehabilitation. It should be implemented in consent with the local villagers as per their requirements, he added.

Masterplan to follow

If completed, the rehabilitation exercise will also pave way for preparing a masterplan for the conservation of monuments at Aihole and also Badami which is imperative to be recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. At present, they are in the tentative list.

Mr. Rangaraju, who is also the former chairman and dean of the Department of History and Archaeology, University of Mysore, said while the Hoysala monuments have gained recognition in the recent past, the monuments of Badami Chalukyas and Kalyani Chalukyas are yet to be promoted and efforts should be stepped up in this connection.

Celebration of heritage and sport: Kodava hockey festival to be held from March 30 to April 28

Darshan Devaiah B.P.
MADIKERI

For the Kodava community of the small, hilly district of Kodagu in Karnataka, now scattered across the globe, it's time to return to their roots for an event that's deeply ingrained in their cultural fabric – the Kodava Hockey Namme (festival). This annual extravaganza brings together families from far and wide to celebrate their love for hockey and their shared heritage.

Organised in the small town of Napoklu, 21 km away from the district headquarters of Madikeri, this festival is no ordinary affair. Recognised as one of the largest field hockey tournaments globally, it has earned a place in the Limca Book of Records.

This year, the excitement is soaring as the Kundyolanda family takes the reins, transforming it into the 'Kundyolanda Hockey Carnival'. The year's event will be held from March 30 to April 28.

The Kodava Hockey Namme (festival) has been recognised as one of the largest field hockey tournaments globally. FILE PHOTO

Community spirit

The Kodava community organises the inter-family hockey tournament every year where players from over 300 local families come together to play. The sporting event has no bar on age or gender. The only rule of forming a team is that all members must be from the same family.

Dinesh Cariappa, convenor of the Kundyolanda Hockey Carnival (KHC), said, "This year, we aim to set a new milestone by hosting the largest field hockey tournament yet. It's not just about the sport. It's about fostering community spirit and giving back to our people."

The organisers have introduced a range of initiatives this year, encompassing career guidance sessions, motivational speeches by experts across different domains, all geared towards empowering the youth. Additionally, free health check-ups, discussions on wealth management, and talks covering diverse topics such as defense, aviation, and agriculture have been arranged for attendees.

Ramesh Muddaiah, president of Kundyolanda Hockey Carnival, said, "We are hopeful that the Karnataka Government will extend its support to the hockey festival, just as it has done for previous editions of the event. Government backing would bolster our efforts to make this carnival a grand success."

With 360 families slated to participate, the enthusiasm is palpable. The carnival promises much more than just hockey matches. A food festival showcasing Kodava delicacies and also other cuisine, matrimonial initiatives, and cultural events celebrating the rich heritage of the community are all part of the extravaganza.

"There are plans for educational sessions on traditional Kodava folk songs, popularly known as Baloo Paat, ensuring the preservation of cultural traditions. Apart from these, two marathons – 5 km and 10 km – are scheduled, selfie points dotted across the venue to capture memorable moments, creating lasting memories for attendees," Mr. Cariappa said.

The carnival kicks off with much fanfare on March 30 with an inaugural match between the Indian Navy team and the Coorg 11 team. It sets the stage for a month-long celebration of sport, culture, and camaraderie.

A long way

The late Pandanda Kuttappa started the concept of the Kodava family hockey tournament, which later evolved into a significant sporting event and festival. "Mr. Kuttappa initiated the Kodava Family Hockey Tournament in 1997, organised by the Pandanda family initially, with the belief that harnessing the inherent affection Kodavas have for hockey could foster unity among families and the community," Mr. Cariappa explained.

From the last one decade, the tournament has emerged as a platform for the community members to discuss trade and business interests, besides scouting for marital alliances, according to Mr. Muddaiah.

"In the first tournament, which was organised in 1997, nearly 60 teams took part. The format of the tournament was such that every year, one of the Kodava families had to host the event. Now, over 300 families participate involving 3,000 hockey players," he added.

Preparation for the 2024 edition is underway at the Napoklu General Thimayya Ground, one of the town's three mud grounds. Temporary bleachers surround the ground to accommodate approximately 30,000 spectators. Various amenities, including galleries, lighting, speakers, and display boards, have been installed.

IISc researchers propose using multiple swarms of drones to tackle forest fires

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Indian Institute of Science (IISc) researchers have proposed to use multiple swarms of drones to tackle natural disasters like forest fires.

As forest fires are becoming increasingly catastrophic across the world, accelerated by climate change, the researchers in a new study propose that swarms of drones could be the solution.

"By the time somebody identifies and reports a fire, it has already started spreading and cannot be put out with one drone. You need to have a swarm of drones. A swarm that can communicate with each other," said Suresh Sundaram, professor, Department of Aerospace Engineering, IISc.

Multiple swarms of drones for testing the proposed approach for disaster management. The image depicts search and mitigation for two targets illustrated as white circles by three swarms of drones. FILE PHOTO

IISc said that the solution was to design a special kind of algorithm that would allow the swarm to communicate with each other as well as make independent decisions.

In a hypothetical scenario, when an alarm is raised about a potential fire, the swarms can be sent in, each drone armed with cameras, thermal and infrared sensors, and temperature detectors, to spot the fires.

Once the fire is discovered, the drone closest to it becomes the swarm's center and attracts others toward it. Interestingly, each drone will also have autonomy to calculate the fire's size and potential spread and decide how many drones are needed to quench the fire. "These decisions are made by the drones. They figure out which cluster of fire is going to spread faster, and allocate the required number of drones to put out that fire while the others look for other fire clusters," Prof Sundaram said.

Not random

The swarm-based search algorithm developed by the team is key to controlling the drones' behaviour. Searching for fire cannot be random as the area to explore would be too large. To address this, the researchers took inspiration from the foraging behaviour of a marine predator, a flagellum called Oxyrrhis marina.

The researchers have tested specific components of the approach, such as the AI-enabled fire detection using thermal cameras, and accurate payload drop mechanism for fire extinguisher deployment.

Full-scale search and mitigation by the swarm is yet to undergo field-testing. Going forward, they plan to combine such drone swarms with unmanned ground vehicles that can carry resources and serve as refuelling stations.

Christ university bags insurance education award

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Department of Professional Studies, School of Commerce, Finance and Accountancy, Christ (Deemed to be University), created a record of completing 1,000 licentiate holders of the Insurance Institute of India. Licentiate is the first level of three levels: Associate and Fellowship, a diploma in Insurance. The students of the campus also completed over 100 associates and 50 fellows, besides All India Rank 1 in all three levels.

According to a release from Christ (Deemed to be University), Secretary General of Insurance Institute of India (III), S.N. Satpathy, along with officials from III, Mumbai, conferred the Excellence in Insurance Education award to Christ University on March 21. Vice-Chancellor of the University, Fr. Dr. Jose, received the award. Students and Alumni received awards under various categories, during the event. In his address, Fr. Dr. Jose appreciated the students and urged them to work together as a team with industry to improve the current insurance penetration of 4.26%.

Cricketer renews leopard adoption

The Hindu Bureau
MYSURU

For the sixth consecutive year, Indian woman cricketer Veda Krishnamurthy has been adopting a leopard at the Mysuru zoo.

The cricketer renewed the adoption of an Indian leopard named Bhavana for another year from March 21, 2024, to March 20, 2025, making a payment of ₹50,000, the zoo authorities said.

Two-day property expo from today

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Hindu "Living Spaces 2024" Property Expo will be held at Chandra Sagara Convention Hall, 2nd Block, Jayanagar (near Ashoka Pillar), Bengaluru, on Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

More than 200 options

There will be over 30 stalls, where visitors can explore property options and receive guidance from experts in the real estate industry and financial institutions. More than 200 prestigious projects and financial institutions will offer attractive options. Investment advisers will provide information on various projects.

The event will be inaugurated on Saturday at 10 a.m. by Namratha Gowda, a television actress who recently appeared on the Kannada reality show Bigg Boss season 10.

On Sunday, actor and Bigg Boss 2024 season 10 winner Karthik Mahesh will be the special chief guest.

Plantation worker dies in jumbo attack

The Hindu Bureau
SHIVAMOGGA

An agriculture labourer, a native of Tamil Nadu, died after he was attacked by a tusker in a coffee estate near Kanchenahalli in Chikkamagaluru taluk on Friday.

Sridhar, 68, was working in a coffee estate that belonged to Mahesh when he encountered the lone tusker. He suffered serious injuries in the incident. Those working in the estate took him to the district hospital at Chikkamgaluru.

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-II
BSNL Building (Fourth Floor) Telephone House
Raj Bhavan Road, Bengaluru - 560001

O.A.No.: 745 of 2017

Between:

M/s. Indian Overseas Bank, a body corporate, constituted under the Banking Companies (Acquisition and Transfer of Undertakings) Act 1970, having its central office at No.763, Anna Salai Chennai and one of its Branch Offices at No.39 SLV Plazza, Bull Temple Road, Basavanagudi, Bangalore 560004, ... **Applicant**

And

M/s. Leo International Proprietor, Mr. Y. Preetham No.32, 1st main, 2nd Cross BSK 1st Stage , 2nd Block, Srinivasa Nagar Bangalore - 560050 ..... **Defendant**

SUMMONS / NOTICE

Whereas, the Applicant has instituted an Original application for recovery of the loan obtained by you by applicant Bank U/s. 19 of Recovery of Debts Due to the Bank and Financial Institution Act 1993, for the recovery of sum of **Rs.67,88,744.15** the relief claimed in application and for other reliefs. (Application of documents etc., Annexed)

In accordance with sub-section (4) of section 19 of the Act, you, the defendant is directed as under:-

1. To show cause within thirty days of the service of summons as to why relief prayed for should not be granted.
2. Disclose particulars of properties or assets other then parties and assets specified by the applicant under serial number 3A of the Original Application.
3. You are restrained from dealing with or disposing of secured assets or such other assets and properties disclosed under serial number 3A of the Original Application pending hearing and disposal or the application for attachment of properties.
4. You shall not transfer by way of sale, lease or otherwise, except in the ordinary course of his business any of the assets over which security interest is created and or other assets and properties specified or disclosed under serial number 3A of the original application without the perior approval of the Tribunal.
5. You shall be liable to account for the sale proceeds relized by the sale of secured assets or other assets and properties in the ordinary course of business and deposit such as sale proceeds in the account maintained with the bank or financial institution-holding security interest over such assets.
6. You are also directed to file the written statement with a copy thereof furnished to the applicant and to appear before Registrar on 18-04-2024 at 10.30 AM failing which the application shall be heard and decided in your absence.

Given under my hand and the seal of the Tribunal , this 12th day of February, 2024
Sd/- Authorized to Issue Summons
Debts Recovery Tribunal-2, Bangalore

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public are informed that, my clients **1. SRI. GULAB JAN, Aadhar No. 305621447155, PAN No. AHLPJ9065A,** son of Sri. Basanth Kumar, residing at. No.158, Kesari Kunuj, Near Bata Showroom, 2nd Main Road, Chamarajpet, Bangalore-560 018 and **SRI. PANKAJ KUMAR MEHTA,** son of Sri. Kiranmal Mehta, R/at. No.1202, D Block, Eta Garden, Near Binny Mill, Magadi Road, Bengaluru-560 023, **Aadhar No.370987920502, PAN No.AJGPM9081J,** are **intended to purchase**, All that piece and parcel of the house property bearing **Municipal No. 14, PID No.48-7-14,** measuring **East to West 34 feet** and **North to South 27 feet 6 inches,** in all measuring **935 Sq. ft., (938.4 Sq. ft.,** as per khatha extract) and the exclusive **passage** measuring **East to West 26 feet** and **North to South 10 feet,** in all **measuring 1195 Sq. ft.,** with a building thereon, comprised of ground floor measuring **700 Sq. ft.,** and first floor measuring **300 Sq. ft.,** situated at 6th Cross, H. Siddaiah Road, Bangalore and bounded on the: **East by: Subbanna's property, West by: 6th Cross, North by: Rahmathulla's Property, South by : Asmathunnisa's Property, from MR. LALITH KUMAR, PAN No.AKRPK3559M, Aadhar No.437372069457**, Son of Mr. Savarmji residing at No.17, 8th Cross, H. Siddaiah Road, Bengaluru -560 027.

Any person/s claiming an interest in the said property or any part thereof by way of Sale, Gift, Lease, inheritance, exchange, mortgage, charge, lien, trust, possession, easement, attachments, Maintenance or otherwise, or any one having any claim over the said property or any other claims by any person/s, agreement Holders, MOU, sale transactions, Nationalized banks, MNC Banks, Private Banks, Co-Operative Banks any Financial institutions, Governed by the RBI Rules or Private Financers may lodge their objections in writing within **15 days** from date hereof, to the under mentioned Advocate. Failing which the said sale will be completed, without any reference to such claim and the same if any, shall be considered as waived.

S.SHABEER, Advocate,
S.S. Law Associates & Legal Consultants
No.12A, I Floor, HHS & HMS Complex,
Cubbonpet Main Road, Bangalore -560 002

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public are informed that, my client **1. SRI. JOGESH KUMAR, Aadhar No. 432914072565, PAN No. AHYPK0900G,** son of Sri. Basanth Kumar, residing at. No.158, 3rd Floor, 2nd Main Road, Chamarajpet, Bangalore-560 018, is **intended to purchase,** All that piece and parcel of the property bearing **No.14/1 [Earlier Front North Western Portion** of premises bearing **No.14** (Old No.22/6)], situated at 6th Cross, H. Siddaiah Road, Bangalore, BBMP Ward No.48, **PID No.48-7-14/1,** measuring **East to West: 24-0 feet** and **North to South: 17-0 feet**, and bounded on the: **East by : Portion of property No.14 belonging to T. Abdul Munaf and Asmathunnisa, West by : 6th Cross Road, North by : Property belonging to Rehmathulla, South by : Portion of property No.14, 6th Cross, with passage belonging to T. Abdul Munaf and Asmathunnissa., from SMT. NAGEEN TAJ, PAN No.AEIPT6679J, Aadhar No.553112624454,** wife of Sri. Sher Ali and her legal heirs, all are residing at No.11, 6th Cross, H. Siddaiah Road, Bengaluru -560 027.

Any person/s claiming an interest in the said property or any part thereof by way of Sale, Gift, Lease, inheritance, exchange, mortgage, charge, lien, trust, possession, easement, attachments, Maintenance or otherwise, or any one having any claim over the said property or any other claims by any person/s, agreement Holders, MOU, sale transactions, Nationalized banks, MNC Banks, Private Banks, Co-Operative Banks any Financial institutions, Governed by the RBI Rules or Private Financers may lodge their objections in writing within **15 days** from date hereof, to the under mentioned Advocate. Failing which the said sale will be completed, without any reference to such claim and the same if any, shall be considered as waived.

S.SHABEER, Advocate,
S.S. Law Associates & Legal Consultants
No.12A, I Floor, HHS & HMS Complex,
Cubbonpet Main Road, Bangalore -560 002

PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to bring to the NOTICE of General Public that **Smt. G. JAYASHREE** aged about 54 years, d/o. Late. G. Purushotham and w/o. K. Gurunath R/at No. 17/2, Ground Floor, Somanatha Modilyar Street, Vannarpet, Vivekanagar Post, BANGALORE 560 047 is the full and absolute owner of the Eastern side of Old Municipal No. 33 situated at **Sonnenahalli Civil Station, Bangalore City,** which is morefully described in the schedule below.

It is further notified to the General Public that G. Jayashree had lost the Original Gift Deed dated 20/08/2020 executed by Kousalya in favour of G. Jayashree, registered as Document No. INR-1-02789/2020-21 of Book - I stored in C.D. No. INRD 633 in the office of the Senior Sub-Registrar, Indiranagar, Bangalore. A Police complaint in this regard was lodged with Bengaluru City Police vide Lost Report No.0872041/2024 dated 02/01/2024. We, hereby request on behalf of G. JAYASHREE that if any person/s come across or find the same, he/she/they are requested to hand over the same to the below mentioned address & they will be compensated accordingly.

The General Public are hereby cautioned that if anybody deals with the Schedule Property with any person/s on the basis of the misplaced/lost document mentioned above, it is at their own risk & cost and such person/s will not derive any title over the Schedule Property and in such an event they have no claim of whatsoever nature against G. Jayashree nor against the Schedule Property.

SCHEDULE PROPERTY

ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL of sheet roofed house area constructed on the Western side of the property bearing No.33, New Municipal No. 17 of SONNENHALLI, Civil Station, Bangalore City, Bangalore Mahanagara Palike Ward No. 71, VILLAGE, K.R. Puram Hobli, Bangalore East Taluk, measuring East to West 13. 3 feet and North to South 13 feet and also 50% undivided right in the RCC Roofed room measuring East to West 07.9 feet and North to South 09 feet along with 3.8 squares of AC sheet roofed house built therein and 0.72 squares of ground floor RCC roofed house & bounded on :-

East by : 6"-08" of common passage and portion of the same property now allotted to Smt. Lakshmi; West by : Schedule 'A1' Property belongs to K. Gurunath and K. Jagadeesh; North by : Staircase and then path and Municipal Drain & South by : Southern portion of the same property belonged to Smt. Mallika.

M/s. GANJAM NAGARAJ ASSOCIATES,
Advocates
Office at No. 312, Ground Floor, 21st 'A' Cross, 6th Block, Jayanagar, BANGALORE - 560 082.
Dated : 22/03/2024 Bangalore

BBMP identifies three parcels of land on outskirts of city for integrated waste processing parks

Private investors will not only set up processing facilities but also be in charge of collection and transportation of waste

K.V. Aditya Bharadwaj
BENGALURU

Bengaluru's civic administration has identified three large parcels of land in West, South and Northern outskirts of the city to establish integrated waste processing parks, even as the hunt for a large parcel of land is underway in the East.

The integrated waste processing parks will be developed in public-private partnership mode. FILE PHOTO

₹100 crore

According to its Budget presented on February 29, Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) is looking for 'large parcels of land of 50 to 100 acres each in four different directions for treatment of waste for next 25 to 30 years', and earmarked ₹100 crore for the purchase of these lands.

Sources in the civic body said that they have already sent a proposal to the Urban Development Department for three parcels of land in the South, West and Northern outskirts of Bengaluru. "We have proposed acquiring 90 acres on which a private company MSGP has been running a waste processing unit for many years. The acquisition cost of this land will be over ₹100 crore," a senior civic official said.

Apart from this, two other parcels of land identified by the civic body belong to the government.

"There is a large parcel of land, of about 150 acres, in Bidadi of Karnataka Power Corporation Limited, where we are already putting up a Waste-to-Energy plant on 10 acres. We have proposed to take over another 90 acres as well. Meanwhile, in the South, there is a large parcel of 175 acres with the Public Works Department (PWD). This land was reacquired from Bangalore-Mysore Infrastructure Corridor," the official explained.

However, as for the east of the city, "We are not able to find a parcel large enough – of at least 100 acres. Most parcels we have inspected are very small," the official said.

These lands are intended to be developed into Integrated Waste Processing Parks in Public Private Partnership (PPP) mode. "The private investors have to not only put processing facilities, like waste segregators, composting units, bio-methanation plants, and dry waste processing centres, but will also be given charge of collection and transportation of waste in their respective areas. The entire city will be divided into four zones. One contractor will be in charge of end-to-end waste collection-to-processing in these zones," the official explained.

Content creator Sonu Gowda arrested over illegal 'adoption' of girl child

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Social media content creator and a former Bigg Boss television show contestant Sonu Srinivas Gowda, 29, has been arrested for illegally "adopting" a girl child.

The 8-year-old child has been rescued and handed over to the Child Welfare Committee. The girl was with Ms. Gowda for 41 days and has now been rescued, police said.

S. Girish, Deputy Commissioner of Police (West), Bengaluru said Byadarahalli Police have arrested Sonu Gowda under the Juvenile Justice Act (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 on Friday based on a complaint by an official from Women and Child Development Department alleging the accused has not followed adoption procedures properly.

Ms. Gowda, with over 1 million followers on her social media handles, is a popular content creator in Kannada.

Posting videos

She had been posting videos with the 8-year-old girl for the past several weeks, claiming she adopted the child from her parents in Raichur.

Ms. Gowda claimed she met the girl near her house when she was feeding stray dogs and the girl was the daughter of a construction labourer couple from Raichur.

She had claimed that she had adopted the child legally and the procedure took three months.

She had even posted a video of her visiting the girl's family in Raichur and picking up the girl. Later she had posted several videos on her social media handles and YouTube channel with the girl.

Identity violation

Geeta, an official with the Women and Child Development Department, the complainant in the case, told media persons that the adoption was not legally done and several norms, including not disclosing the identity of the adopted child, had been violated in this case.

Ms. Gowda has reportedly told the police that she did not have any ulterior motive, but did not know the legal procedures for adopting a child properly and this had led to this situation. She has been remanded to police custody for four days.

BMRCL extends train services for IPL; services to begin early for marathon

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

BMRCL will commence its train services from 4.30 a.m. instead of 7 a.m. from all four terminals and from the interchange station Nadaprabhu Kempegowda Metro Station- Majestic on Sunday to facilitate hassle-free travel for people to participate in the Bidadi Half Marathon at Bidadi Industrial area.

BMRCL is also extending its last train services to 11.30 p.m. departing from all its four terminal metro stations on March 25, 29, and April 2 in view of the Indian Premier League (IPL) cricket matches scheduled to be held at Chinnaswamy Stadium in city.

On all match days, return journey paper tickets of ₹50 will be available for sale at all the metro stations from 2 p.m. onwards. This is valid at Cubbon Park and M.G. Road stations.

This is applicable only for a single journey to any other metro station, on the day of issue from 8 p.m. onwards up to the closure of extended services of the day and no tokens will be issued.

Besides, QR code tickets, smart cards and CMC cards also can be used as usual.

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A BG-BGE

It is a do-or-die battle for many Cong. Ministers as their kin are in the fray

The victory of their children will be crucial for the leaders to continue in the State government after the general elections

Nagesh Prabhu
BENGALURU

With several ruling Congress Ministers in Karnataka having fielded their sons, daughters or relatives in the Lok Sabha election, the pressure is on them to drive the campaign from the front and ensure their victory.

This would mean that these Ministers – Ramalinga Reddy (father of Sowmya Reddy who is contesting in Bengaluru South), Satish Jarkiholi (father of Priyanka Jarkiholi who is contesting in Chikkodi), Laxmi Hebbalkar (mother of Mrinal Ravindra Hebbalkar who is contesting in Belagavi), Shivanand Patil (father of Samyukta Patil who is contesting in Bagalkot), and Eshwar Khandre (father of Sagar Khandre who is contesting in Bidar) – will hit the ground to ensure their victory.

The victory of their children would be crucial for the Ministers to continue in the State government after the general elections. Defeat of these candidates could mean a big setback and pressure would mount on them to give up Cabinet berths, say party sources.

Mrinal Hebbalkar, son of Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar, with Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, and (right) a file photo of Minister Ramalinga Reddy with his daughter Sowmya Reddy.

Dynasts cutting across party lines

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

It appears that the continued phenomenon of children of leaders entering politics – cutting across party lines – would render the much-used phrase of 'dynastic politics' a not-so-potent weapon for leaders.

With influential political leaders from all parties fielding sons, daughters, or wives in the Lok Sabha poll, political succession plans are being rolled out seamlessly. While the JD(S) has relatives of party supremo H.D. Deve Gowda who are likely to contest and is traditionally dubbed a "father-son party", the BJP is facing rebellion because senior leader B.S. Yediyurappa is accused of indulging in "nepotism" to favour his sons. The Congress has fielded children of five Cabinet Ministers. Across parties, securing ticket for sons and daughters ensures that no alternative power centre is created in these "family" constituencies".

Such Ministers have to not only mobilise funds but also the cadre to ensure the victory of their children. In a move to gain support, some Ministers had introduced their children to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and sought his blessings in the run-up to the campaign, even before the list was officially announced.

While Ms. Reddy, who holds an engineering degree, has experience of the electoral battle, the other four candidates who are the children of Ministers are testing the electoral waters for the first time.

In Davangere constituency, the Congress has fielded Prabha Mallikarjun, daughter-in-law of party veteran and Veerashaiva-Lingayat strongman Shamanur Shivashankarappa. Her husband, S.S. Mallikarjun is the Minister for Mines and Geology. Ms. Mallikarjun is facing incumbent BJP MP G.M. Siddeshwar's wife, Gayathri Siddeshwar.

In Kalaburagi, AICC president M. Mallikarjun Kharge has handed over his constituency to his son-in-law Radhakrishna Doddamani. Now, it is the responsibility of Minister Priyank Kharge to step up the campaign to ensure victory of his brother-in-law.

In Bengaluru Central, the Congress has given the ticket to Mansoor Ali Khan, son of the former Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairperson K. Rahman Khan. He will be contesting against P.C. Mohan of the BJP.

Interestingly, there seems to be little dissidence in the Congress. Only some leaders such as Veena Kashappanavar in Bagalkot have been raising voices which are expected to die down during the course of the campaign, sources in the party said.

High Court stays FIRs against Shobha, Tejasvi Surya, Mohan

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

In a temporary relief to three BJP leaders, the High Court of Karnataka on Friday stayed the first information reports (FIRs) registered against Union Minister Shobha Karandlaje, Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya, and Bengaluru Central MP P.C. Mohan in separate cases.

Justice Krishna S. Dixit passed the interim orders on separate petitions filed by the BJP leaders, questioning the legality of registration of FIRs and denying the allegations made against them.

Surya's petition

In his petition, Mr. Surya questioned the registration of an FIR against him on the complaint that he had allegedly tried to disturb communal harmony by posting certain comments on social media about the March 17 incident of assault on a shopkeeper at Nagarthpet in the city, allegedly over the issue of playing Hanuman Chalisa.

This case was registered on a complaint filed by a member of election flying squad team, who acted based on a complaint by a group of activists against hate speech.

"A perusal of the subject post shows that *prima facie* it is faith-neutral and therefore Section 153-A [promoting enmity between different groups on ground of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc] of the IPC does not appear to be invocable. After all, our democratic polity warrants public discussion/debate on and intelligent participation in the public affairs...," the court observed in its interim order.

In her petition, Ms. Karandlaje questioned the legality of the FIR registered by the Cottonpet police in the city for allegedly violating the election model code of conduct, making a provocative statement aiming to create enmity between groups while addressing a gathering on the Nagarthpet incident.

In their other petitions, Mr. Surya and Mr. Mohan questioned registration of an FIR, in which both have been named as co-accused along with others, for illegally assembling and holding demonstration at Siddanna Lane, Nagarthpet, on March 19 to protest against the March 17 incident of assault.

CM, Surjewala condemn freezing of Congress bank accounts; demand 'level playing field'

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and AICC general secretary in charge of Karnataka Randeep Singh Surjewala on Friday alleged that the NDA government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was making every attempt to cripple the Congress campaign in the run-up to the Lok Sabha elections by freezing 11 accounts of the party in different banks.

An all-out attack

At a press conference, both leaders mounted an all-out attack on the Union government, alleging that all Central agencies had been used to restrict the operation of Congress' bank accounts, following a tax dispute. They demanded a level playing field to contest the Lok Sabha election.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, KPCC president D.K. Shivakumar, and AICC general secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala at a press conference in Bengaluru on Friday.

Mr. Surjewala alleged that democracy and parliamentary institutions were under attack, and the government had seized more than ₹200 crore of the party's funds in different banks and curtailed the supply of publicity materials, advertisement in the media, and tours of the leaders.

Mr. Surjewala termed the Narendra Modi-led government "fascist" and said Chief Ministers of two States had been arrested just a few weeks before polling. The BJP has been using the Governors as its tool to pursue its political agenda, he said.

Mr. Siddaramaiah said the BJP and the Centre have no trust in democracy and they would not ensure free and fair polls. He condemned the freezing of the party's bank accounts and claimed that the BJP had been using all kinds of political tactics with a fear of losing the Lok Sabha election.

In Karnataka, BJP leaders indulged in 'Operation Lotus' by using black money and still they have been trying to poach the Congress legislators by paying ₹50 crore each. "Is this not black money?" the Chief Minister asked. However, the Congress would win 20 seats in the State in the Lok Sabha election, he said. KPCC president and Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar said the funds mobilised by the party through the membership drive had been seized and demanded a level playing field for all parties in the coming elections.

PM to make six to eight more visits to State for poll campaign

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to make six to eight more visits to the State for poll campaign. While the Prime Minister was originally scheduled to visit each of the eight Lok Sabha clusters in Karnataka, the party State unit has requested him to add two more visits.

Mr. Modi has already completed two of his eight visits to the State. However, the party State unit wants him to take up two more visits and hold roadshows in Bengaluru and Mangaluru, sources in the party said.

One of the poll conventions to be addressed by the Prime Minister would include a joint convention with JD(S) top leaders H.D. Deve Gowda and H.D. Kumaraswamy, source said. The place and schedule of the convention is yet to be decided.

One of the election conventions to be addressed by Modi will be a joint one with JD(S) top leaders

The party has divided the 28 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka into eight clusters with each accounting for three to four seats, for effective planning based on local geo-cultural issues, sources noted.

In addition to Mr. Modi, other central leaders, including Amit Shah and Smriti Irani, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, and Tamil Nadu BJP president K. Annamalai, will also visit Karnataka.

Street corner meetings

The BJP State unit is also focussing on street corner meetings as they would provide opportunity for close interaction with people. The party is planning to hold about 500 of them, at a rate of minimum of two per polling booth. "We are preparing a set of grassroot-level leaders and volunteers to handle them," said a senior leader.

AAP protests Kejriwal's arrest

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) unit in Karnataka observed a 'black day' and held a day-long protest at Freedom Park in Bengaluru on Friday, condemning the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister and AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal by the Directorate of Enforcement.

Mukhyamantri Chandru, president, AAP - Karnataka, termed it "the murder of democracy" and said, "Nothing better could be expected of people who want to change the Constitution."

'Scared of popularity'

"Mr. Kejriwal is not just a person, but represents an ideal. The ruling party is scared of the popularity of Mr. Kejriwal and has conspired to not only get him arrested but also ensure he doesn't get bail. The Union government has been systematically using Central agencies to target anyone who is opposed to it," Mr. Chandru said.

Marithibbe Gowda joins Congress

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, along with KPCC president D.K. Shivakumar, welcoming former MLCs Marithibbe Gowda and Appaji Gowda to the Congress, in Bengaluru on Friday.

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

A day after resigning from the membership of the Legislative Council, four-time MLC Marithibbe Gowda quit the JD(S) on Friday and joined the Congress in the presence of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and KPCC president and Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar. Mr. Gowda said he quit the JD(S) opposing the family-based politics and lack of communication between him and the party supremo and former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda and his sons for the last four years.

The former MLC said he would work for the victory of the Congress candidates in Hassan, Mandya, Chamarajanagar, and Mysuru constituencies. He was elected from the teachers' constituency from these districts for four times since 2002.

The former legislator Appaji Gowda, leaders and workers of JD(S) and BJP from Mandya and Bengaluru Rural districts also joined the Congress.

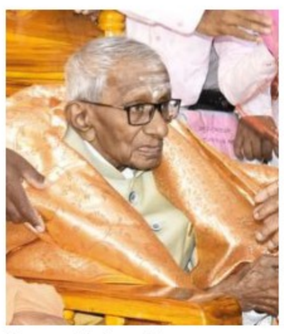
Spotlight on grandsons of political bigwigs

Sagar Khandre, grandson of Bheemanna Khandre, will fight for Bidar seat; Prajwal Revanna is likely to contest from Hassan

Nagesh Prabhu
BENGALURU

In Karnataka, dynastic politics is not new and party leaders have fielded their sons and daughters. However, the spotlight during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in the State is on the constituencies of Bidar and Hassan, wherein the grandfathers of candidates have made a big mark in politics.

In Bidar constituency, the Congress candidate is Sagar Khandre, grandson of centenarian and Congress leader Bheemanna Khandre. In Hassan, Prajwal Revanna, incumbent JD(S) MP, whom the party has already projected as its candidate though the ticket is yet to be officially issued, is the grandson of 91-year-old former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda.



Sagar Khandre and his grandfather former Minister Bheemanna Khandre.

JD(S) leader Prajwal Revanna with party supremo and his grandfather H.D. Deve Gowda.

Fourth from family

Mr. Sagar Khadre, 26, is the fourth member of the Khandre family to enter politics. He is the son of Forest Minister Eshwar Khandre. Unlike his father, who holds an engineering degree, Mr. Sagar Khandre holds a law degree like his grandfather. His grandfather was elected to the Legislative Assembly four times and the Legislative Council twice and served as the Minister in the early 1990s in the M. Veerappa Moily-led government. Mr. Bheemanna Khadre was the 20th president of the Akhila Bharat Veerashaiva Mahasabha.

Vijayakumar Khandre, elder brother of Mr. Eshwar Khandre, represented the Bhalki constituency earlier. Currently, Mr. Eshwar Khandre is the chairman of the Shantivardhak Education Society, Bhalki in Bidar district, while Mr. Sagar Khandre is the secretary. The society runs a chain of educational institutions.

Before plunging into politics, Mr. Sagar Khandre served as the secretary of the National Students' Union of India and looked after the campaign of his father in the 2018 and 2023 Assembly elections.

In Hassan

Mr. Prajwal Revanna is the son of MLA H.D. Revanna and grandson of Mr. Deve Gowda, the JD(S) supremo. Mr. Prajwal Revanna, who holds an engineering degree, will likely be contesting the election for the second time – this time against Congress' Shreyas Patel, grandson of the former Minister late G. Puttaswamy Gowda, who had defeated Mr. Deve Gowda in the 1999 Lok Sabha election.

The former Chief Minister H.D. Kumaraswamy is expected to contest from Mandya this time against developer Venkataramana Gowda of the Congress.

Mr. Deve Gowda's son-in-law C.N. Manjunath is contesting from the Benglauru Rural constituency on the BJP ticket against D.K. Suresh of the Congress.

Bengaluru blast: NIA probing possible Chennai links of suspects, say police sources

The NIA officers are looking at the possibility of the prime suspect or his associates visiting Chennai weeks before the blast was triggered in the cafe

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) is probing in Chennai possible links of suspects in the Bengaluru Rameshwaram Cafe blast case, police sources said on Friday.

The NIA officers were looking at the possibility of the prime suspect or his associates visiting Chennai weeks before the blast was triggered in the cafe that left at least 10 people injured on March 1, 2024.

A file photo of broken windows after a low-intensity explosion took place at the Rameshwaram cafe in Bengaluru.

After taking over investigation in the case, the Central agency published a CCTV image grab of the suspect and announced a cash reward of ₹10 lakh for any information leading to his arrest.

While police officers in Chennai said they had no information about any NIA operation in the city, a senior police officer dismissed reports in social media that two suspects in the case had stayed in a lodge in Triplicane for about two months.

In any case, investigators would probe and rule out all angles arising out of technical evidence or intelligence inputs. The State intelligence was coordinating with the national agency in the case, the officer who did not want to be quoted said.

However, the sources said the Special Division of the Special Branch CID was enquiring into an input that two persons had stayed in the city and visited a mall. They were perusing CCTV footage recorded in suspected locations to corroborate the information.

Another police officer said investigators were probing whether the accused persons visited Chennai before or after the blast occurred. "It appears that they transited through Chennai but it can't be confirmed unless concrete evidence is obtained", the officer added.

The Tamil Nadu angle in the blast made news after Union Minister of State Shobha Karandlaje controversially said "people from Tamil Nadu, who come to Karnataka, get trained in Tamil Nadu and plant bombs in Karnataka."

After Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K Stalin strongly condemned the remarks, the Union Minister apologised for her statement.

WEATHERWATCH

Rainfall, temperature & air quality in select metros yesterday

TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 18.00 HRS)

Forecast for Saturday: Heavy rainfall/snowfall likely at isolated places over Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Sub-Himalayan West Bengal. Thunderstorm accompanied with lightning likely at isolated places over Jammu & Kashmir, Ladakh, Muzaffarabad, Bihar, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Kerala and Mahe

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	30.1	17.7	Kozhikode	—	35.7	27.5
Ahmedabad	—	38.9	18.7	Kurnool	—	38.5	25.0
Aizawl	1	25.7	13.5	Lucknow	—	30.6	16.6
Allahabad	—	33.3	15.3	Madurai	—	37.9	25.5
Bengaluru	—	33.0	21.2	Mangaluru	—	33.2	26.6
Bhopal	—	36.4	19.1	Mumbai	—	35.4	24.0
Bhubaneswar	—	33.8	21.3	Mysuru	—	33.8	22.0
Chandigarh	—	30.6	19.7	New Delhi	—	32.6	18.0
Chennai	—	34.1	26.9	Patna	—	28.1	17.9
Coimbatore	—	35.8	24.5	Port Blair	—	32.5	27.0
Dehradun	—	28.0	16.8	Puducherry	—	34.0	25.3
Gangtok	19	15.9	6.9	Pune	—	37.5	21.0
Goa	—	34.6	26.1	Raipur	—	34.8	21.1
Guwahati	5	28.7	16.6	Ranchi	—	28.2	13.5
Hubballi	—	36.0	23.0	Shillong	3	17.8	8.0
Hyderabad	—	36.7	22.4	Shimla	—	23.6	11.8
Imphal	13	23.1	11.9	Srinagar	10	15.2	7.2
Jaipur	—	36.0	19.6	Thiruvananthapuram	—	35.2	26.1
Kochi	—	32.6	27.2	Tiruchi	—	36.5	25.0
Kohima	18	14.2	8.2	Vijayawada	—	36.3	23.4
Kolkata	3	29.4	18.6	Visakhapatnam	—	32.6	24.6

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO_2	NO_2	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	7	81	38	185	125	
Bengaluru	10	17	25	86	116	
Chennai	3	8	76	118	102	
Delhi	35	41	101	258	150	
Hyderabad	3	32	40	60	128	
Kolkata	18	54	23	69	98	
Lucknow	32	11	28	125	102	
Mumbai	81	86	104	226	138	
Pune	95	126	114	66	78	
Visakhapatnam	12	49	21	64	94	

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Badlapur, Maharashtra recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 310 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh recorded a healthy AQI score of 26

Air Quality Code: Poor Moderate Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO_2: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_2: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

Political vendetta behind Kejriwal's arrest, says VCK chief

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) president Thol. Thirumavalavan on Friday condemned the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the Delhi excise policy case.

He said it will only galvanise the Opposition Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) in the upcoming Lok Sabha election.

In an interaction with journalists of *The Hindu* in Chennai, Mr. Thirumavalavan charged that Mr. Kejriwal's arrest was "political vendetta" by the BJP.

"Mr. Arvind Kejriwal was [one of those] instrumental in forming the Opposition-led INDIA bloc. The BJP government at the Centre exerted pressure on him to not join the alliance. But he didn't bother about it."

'No links to scam'

According to him, Mr. Kejriwal has no links to the alleged liquor policy scam. "The BJP is even targeting parties like Bharat Rashtra Samithi [BRS], which is not part of the INDIA bloc. The arrest of Mr. Kejriwal will not create any negative impact on our alliance, rather it will have a positive impact."

He said there is strong anti-incumbency against the BJP government at the Centre after its 10-year rule.

VCK leaders Thol. Thirumavalavan and D. Ravikumar during an interaction with journalists of *The Hindu*. S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

"Farmers, labourers, small industries, and the middle class have been highly affected by the BJP's rule. Vulnerable and marginalised sections of society such as Dalits, tribes, and women are unhappy and feeling insecure under Mr. Modi's rule. Atrocities such as honour killings and caste-based and religious violence against them have increased," the VCK leader said. "*Sanathanisation*" is happening in the socio-cultural platform and "corporatisation" is happening in the economic-political platform. This remains the achievement of 10 years of Mr. Modi's rule.

The price of essential commodities is skyrocketing and affects majority of the people.

However, the Union government continues to maintain its corporate nexus and facilitates their growth, he charged.

Milestone yatras

Mr. Thirumavalavan noted that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has travelled across the country – from south to north and east to west – through his Bharat Jodo and Nyay yatras.

"It is a milestone in Indian politics. He met lakhs of people, particularly youngsters, throughout his yatra. I believe it will create a huge impact and a silent revolution in the election," he added.

On senior BJP leaders claiming that their party is targeting to win more than 400 seats in the Lok Sabha election, he felt they may "try to play" with the Electronic Voting Machines.

He also said it is not only the duty of Dalit organisations to spread the ideology of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Other political parties, leaders and NGOs also should come forward to spread his teachings, which are meant for all.

Field lessons

Acing the game: Kerala Blasters coach Ivan Vukomanović interacts with visually challenged football players in Kochi who will be participating in the International Blind Football Tournament in Bangkok. It will be conducted from March 24 to 31. THULASI KAKKAT

Producers should seek permission of District Magistrate to employ child artists: Labour Dept.

Jayanth R.
BENGALURU

Keeping in mind provision of the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, Karnataka government has decided to make it mandatory for producers to get prior permission from the local District Magistrate (Deputy Commissioner) for employing child artists.

Adequate facilities should be provided for continuous progress in education so that the child does not miss out on school lessons and lectures.

The Commissioner of the Labour Department has issued a circular to the Managing Director of Sree Kanteerava Studios Limited, Karnataka Chalanachitra Academy, Karnataka Media Academy, and Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce (KFCC), and others.

Following the recent increase in the number of children-based films, dance, drama, singing and other reality shows on television, the government examined the legal aspects of the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Control) Act, 1986.

The Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Control) Act, 1986 and Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Amendment Act 2016 prohibit the employment of children below the age of 14 in all employment processes, except for performing work as a child actor, without affecting the child's right to education.

According to the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Control) Act, 1986, a child who is required to work as an artist may be allowed to work as an artist subject to certain conditions. According to these rules, no child shall be assigned to acting work for more than 5 hours in a day and cannot work for more than 3 hours without rest.

If a child participates in any pro-commercial programme produced by any producer of audio and visual media, the prior permission of the local District Magistrate, where those activities are taking place, should be obtained. In addition, the producer has to give an undertaking to the District Magistrate.

The list of children participating in the programme and permission letter from the parents should be submitted.

Producers should provide facilities necessary for physical and mental well-being of the child. The child should be provided with timely, nutritious food. Protection of the right to education, protection from sexual offences, among other laws, must be followed.

"At least 20% of the total income of the child from the production or programme should be kept in a fixed deposit in the name of the child in a nationalised bank," according to the order.

KFCC

Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce (KFCC) has objected to some of the provisions.

"We are not against rules and regulations, but some rules are tough to follow, and they should be amended," said N.M.Suresh, President, Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce. H.N. Gopalakrishna, Labour Commissioner, told *The Hindu*, "Instead of implementing these rules abruptly, we will approach this issue holistically. We have decided to create awareness among the stakeholders at the district level through workshops, and then we will take action to implement this effectively. Full-time acting will ruin their education. Letting them get formal education is our concern," he said.

From Page One

Board exams to resume on Monday

With the class 10 exam also beginning on Monday, to avoid a clash in timings, the Karnataka State Examination and Assessment Board (KSEAB) has taken steps to conduct the board exams for classes 5, 8, and 9 on March 25 and on March 27 in the afternoon, since class 10 exams are scheduled in the morning. On March 26 and 28, when there is no exam for class 10, the board exam will be held for classes 5, 8, and 9 in the morning. Amidst these developments, the Registered Unaided Private Schools Management Association (RUPSA-Karnataka), a petitioner, has decided to challenge the division bench order before the Supreme Court. Lokesh Talikatte, President of RUPSA-Karnataka, said, "We are fighting only in the interest of the children. Conducting the board exams for classes 5, 8 and 9 is in violation of the Right to Education Act 2009. We will approach the Supreme Court and challenge the order of the High Court division bench." However, the Associated Management of Primary and Secondary Schools in Karnataka welcomed the HC Division Bench order.

ISRO successfully conducts experiment on 'Pushpak' Reusable Landing Vehicle

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has successfully conducted the Pushpak Reusable Landing Vehicle (RLV) LEX 02 landing experiment at the Aeronautical Test Range in Chitradurga on Friday.

The RLV LEX 02 landing experiment is the second of the series of experiments conducted by the space agency.

The test was conducted at 7.10 a.m. on Friday.

ISRO said that after the first RLV-LEX-01 mission, which was accomplished last year, the RLV-LEX-02 demonstrated the autonomous landing capability of RLV off-nominal initial conditions at the release from a Chinook helicopter.

Perfect landing: Pushpak making an autonomous landing on the ATR runway at Chitradurga. ISRO

The RLV was made to undertake more difficult manoeuvrers with dispersions, correct both cross-range and down range and land on the runway in a fully autonomous mode.

"The winged vehicle, called Pushpak was lifted by an Indian Air Force Chinook Helicopter and was released from 4.5 km altitude. After release at a distance of 4 km from the runway, Pushpak autonomously approached the runway along with cross-range corrections. It landed precisely on the runway and came to a halt using its brake parachute landing gear brakes and nose wheel steering system," ISRO said.

"With this second mission, ISRO had re-validated the indigenously developed technologies in the areas of navigation, control systems, landing gear and deceleration systems essential for performing high speed autonomous landing of a space returning vehicle," ISRO said.

'BJP govt. misusing probe agencies by targeting opponents'

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) MPs have alleged that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government at the Centre has been misusing the investigating agencies at a new level and foisting the case against the party MLC K. Kavitha as part of its plans of political vengeance to harass opponents who refuse to toe its line.

Speaking to the media in New Delhi on Friday, BRS party MPs Nama Nageswara Rao, K.R. Suresh Reddy, Vaddiraju Ravichandra and Manne Srinivas Reddy said that BRS has complete faith in the country's judiciary and that Ms. Kavitha would come out unscathed. They mentioned that against the filing of only 200 cases by the Enforcement Directorate during 2004-14, the agency had filed 2,954 cases from 2014.

They stated that Ms. Kavitha was a victim in the case as the Centre was misusing the investigating agencies to harass political opponents ahead of the election. Further, they alleged that the ED was dragging the case for over two years and had intensified it during the election time.

AAP trap

Kejriwal's arrest a reminder of dangers of misusing enforcement agencies

Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Arvind Kejriwal's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) raises disturbing questions about the direction of India's democracy and federalism. The political intent of the arrest of a key leader of the Opposition, and a serving Chief Minister in the run-up to the general election, is unmistakable. The Delhi excise policy case, in which Mr. Kejriwal has been arrested, was registered by the CBI in August 2022, based on which the ED launched its money laundering probe. Several other AAP leaders are in jail – Manish Sisodia from February 2023, and Sanjay Singh from October 2023. If the ED had evidence of corruption, it should have taken the case to trial on a war footing. Keeping the accused in jail, while investigators continue their roving expedition, should be unacceptable in a society ruled by law. When the accused are political opponents of the ruling party, the arrests will be seen as selective enforcement of the law and impairs public confidence in democracy itself. The Supreme Court of India had earlier asked the ED to provide an unbroken chain of evidence showing that ill-gotten money had flowed from the liquor lobby to Mr. Sisodia. The Court had remarked that the competence of the ED lay in bringing to the fore uninterrupted proof linking an accused with the crime proceeds. Later, the Court went on to deny bail to Mr. Sisodia.

This is not the first time a central agency has gone after a constitutional functionary. Hemant Soren resigned as Chief Minister of Jharkhand before his arrest by the ED. As things stand, the democratic politics of this country can be brought to a standstill by central agencies, even as the Court and the Election Commission of India continue to consider all this as routine law enforcement. The pretext that the law is taking its course will not be convincing to any reasonable mind. It is not a coincidence that central agencies are arresting only Opposition leaders on charges of corruption, and even those leaders who faced corruption charges are let off the moment they join hands with the Bharatiya Janata Party. Mr. Kejriwal rose to national prominence by campaigning for an all-powerful agency that would obliterate corruption from public life. He and his band of anarchists challenged a constitutionally elected government through mobocracy, and amplified conspiracy theories such as notional loss to exchequer more than a decade ago. Mr. Kejriwal himself is now ensnared in the logic that he popularised. But two wrongs do not make a right.

Blowback

Pakistan is paying for its role in supporting Islamists in Afghanistan

When the Taliban returned to power in Kabul in August 2021, Imran Khan, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, claimed that Afghanistan had broken the "shackles of slavery". Two and a half years later, the Afghanistan-Pakistan border is a source of friction between the two countries. Pakistan carried out air strikes in the Afghan provinces of Paktika and Khost earlier this week, killing at least eight civilians. Pakistan says it was targeting the Tehrik-I-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which it blames for a surge in terror attacks on its territory. In retaliation, the Taliban launched attacks on Pakistani military posts along the border. An uneasy calm prevails on the border and the bonhomie the Afghan Taliban once enjoyed with the Pakistani military establishment is now lost. Pakistan, which played a key role in the Taliban's rise in the 1990s, has backed the Sunni Islamist group for years. In the late 1990s, when the Taliban were in power, Pakistan was one of only three countries to formally recognise the regime. Islamabad turned against the Taliban under pressure from Washington after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, but it tactfully played a double game over two decades by remaining an American ally in its war on terror while backing the Taliban. The entire Taliban leadership was based in Quetta, Balochistan, during this phase.

Pakistan cultivated the Taliban against the U.S.-and India-backed Afghan government. When the Afghan government of President Ashraf Ghani collapsed in 2021 in the midst of America's withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Taliban's return to power, Pakistan expected to deepen its strategic presence in South Asia through a client regime in Kabul. But the opposite happened. Historically, Afghan governments have not had very good relations with Pakistan, given their disputed border, the Durand Line. When the Taliban were an insurgency, they needed Pakistan and Pakistan needed them as a counterweight to the government in Kabul. But today, the Taliban are the government in Kabul. Besides, the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan strengthened the TTP, also known as the Pakistani Taliban. The Afghan Taliban and the TTP are two different organisations but ideological brothers – both Pashtun, and who follow the strident Deobandi interpretation of Islam and believe in the rule of the Sunni Islamic clergy. In other words, what the TTP wants to achieve in Pakistan is what the Afghan Taliban have already achieved in Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban have not severed their ties with the TTP despite Pakistan's calls and threats, which has put both countries on a collision course. Pakistan has no quick fixes. It has a history of supporting Islamist insurgency, which has come back to haunt the state in one way or the other. In Afghanistan, this policy is facing its latest blowback.

Two wars, the consequences for America's standing

The recent speech by United States Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer calling for a new government in Israel was the equivalent of a political earthquake hitting U.S.-Israel ties that are becoming increasingly fragile. The Democratic Senator is himself Jewish and has had one of the longest relationships with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who he has now charged with "too willing to tolerate the civilian toll" in Gaza.

Earlier, after meeting former U.S. President Donald Trump at Mar-a-Lago, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said Mr. Trump had told him that he would suspend military aid to Ukraine when he came to power. His campaign staffers have noted that Mr. Trump would seek to "quickly negotiate an end to the Russia-Ukraine war" and that the former President believed that the Europeans should pay more for the cost of the conflict.

Manoj Joshi

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The U.S. and the Ukraine war

The Israel-Hamas and the Ukraine wars are two important global issues which are playing out in unforeseen ways even as the U.S. is hurtling towards its epochal presidential elections eight months from now. To what extent they will be driven by election-year politics or their own future course is unclear. But, for better or for worse, the U.S. is playing a key role in both of them and their outcomes could have consequences for the standing of the country, regardless of who wins in November 2024.

The U.S. has provided some $75 billion in military and civil aid to Ukraine since February 2022. Most of the aid has been used in weapons purchases, keeping the government functional and its humanitarian requirements. Observers say that the bulk of the military aid has been spent in the U.S. to purchase equipment ranging from Stinger missiles to the High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) weapons systems and artillery ammunition.

But, since the end of last year, an additional $60 billion assistance has been stuck in the wrangling of the U.S. Congress. The Administration and the Pentagon have been left scrounging for funds to ensure that Ukraine gets some military equipment. But soon this is also likely to run dry. The European Union (EU) has committed some €144 billion in aid to Ukraine. Of this some €93 billion is financial and economic support, €33 billion in military support and €17 billion in supporting refugees within the EU; another €12 billion is in financial, economic and humanitarian support by individual EU States. But the Europeans are nowhere near providing the level of military assistance that the U.S. has. It is unlikely that the U.S. will send further military aid in 2024, though the Senate has approved a new package, but it needs to pass the fractious House of Representatives.

> To what extent the Ukraine and Gaza wars will be driven by U.S. election-year politics or their own future course, is unclear

The U.S. is in a strange place with regard to Ukraine. It obviously does not want a Russian victory, but it also does not want the war to expand or to drag on. Speaker Mike Johnson knows that if he brings the Senate bill to vote in the House of Representatives, it will pass with the help of traditional Republicans. But the Make America Great Again (MAGA) Republicans would thereafter vote for his removal.

The situation on the ground is none too good for Ukraine. With the failure of its summer offensive last year, it has not been able to find a viable strategy to counter the Russians. Shortages and poor tactics have led to a highly publicised defeat in Avdiivka.

After blundering in the initial invasion of Ukraine, the Russians have learnt their lessons well. They have used their superiority in numbers and equipment to stymie the Ukrainians. They have a clear edge in electronic warfare and artillery, and are using their Unified Gliding and Correction Module (UMPK) Glide bombs to devastating effect on the war front. On the other hand, the Ukrainians are short of key artillery ammunition, with a substantial portion of it having been diverted for Israeli use by the Americans last October.

Israel and its Gaza actions

The other uncomfortable issue is Israel's war on Hamas. The U.S. remains, perhaps, the only major country backing Israel. But now, very publicly, U.S. President Joe Biden himself and Mr. Schumer are raising issues about Israeli strategy, or the lack of it. Former U.S. official Richard N. Haass, who is also Jewish, wrote in The Wall Street Journal recently, "Israel's actions have left it worse off, at a great cost to itself and its relationship with the US and in the lives of innocent Palestinians." These actions and comments reflect that change in public sentiment towards Mr. Netanyahu in the Democratic Party and the liberal Jewish-American community.

Having destroyed most of Gaza, Israeli forces are now threatening the last corner of the strip – Rafah. Mr. Biden has warned that an attack there would be to cross the U.S. redline because it would most certainly result in a large number of civilian casualties. But Mr. Netanyahu seems to be motivated by just one impulse – his own political survival.

Israel has so far demonstrated what it could do militarily, but under the right wing Netanyahu government, it has refused to put forward any political alternative for the Palestinians. Israel needs to articulate a future that leads to a sustainable peace in the region and an Israel-Palestinian reconciliation. A Palestinian state, even with limits on its sovereignty is the only path to that goal. Indeed, Mr. Netanyahu's strategy of supporting Hamas in the past was aimed at splitting the Palestinian opinion and using the fear of Hamas to shape Israeli public perceptions.

On both Ukraine and Israel, the future U.S. approach appears to be clouded. Though we know the trajectory of the Biden policy and its shape, it is still difficult to predict the future because the earlier bipartisan approach to foreign, especially security policy is now history. Whether it is political parties, or demographies, changes are taking place in the manner with which the U.S. views the world. For example, younger Americans are less positively inclined to Israel than the older ones. Indeed, last October a YouGov poll found that more people between the ages of 18 to 29 empathised with Palestinians than with Israelis.

The Trump factor

But the bottom line here is that we are still eight months away from the U.S. election and, as of now, neither the U.S. or Ukraine is about to throw in the towel. Both sides remain committed and need each other. Besides hardware, Ukraine is receiving substantial intelligence support from the U.S. in the form of real-time information on Russian deployments. The way the Americans see it, the Ukrainians are weakening one of their major adversaries. The massive loss of personnel and equipment will without doubt temper Moscow's future policies towards the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

But without doubt a victory of Mr. Trump would be majorly disruptive. This would definitely affect U.S. policy towards Ukraine. As for Israel, Mr. Trump is likely to remain a strong supporter that he has always been. One must recall that it was he who decided to recognise Jerusalem as the Israeli capital in the place of Tel Aviv.

But a Trump victory, which will change the political calculus in Washington DC, has implications for Ukraine and the NATO alliance. The Europeans are rushing to fill the American breach, but it is a case of too little and too late. The momentum in the war is with the Russians right now and if Ukraine is not able to regain it, there is every possibility of a Ukrainian collapse if the U.S. decides to step aside.

This would have wider consequences such as undermining the role of the U.S. as a guarantor of European security. American unreliability will also affect its alliance relationships in the Indo-Pacific – with South Korea, Japan and the Philippines, and its growing partnership with India.

The CAA, Muslim exclusion and the lens of the right

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, while speaking at a conclave recently, gave two reasons, during the discussion, for the exclusion of Muslims from Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh in the recently implemented Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), 2019. The first is Partition and the second is that as these Muslim countries are officially Islamic states, the case of persecution against Muslims does not arise.

Shaikh Mujibur Rehman

is the author of the forthcoming book, 'Shikwa-e-Hind: The Political Future of Indian Muslims' and teaches at Jamia Millia Central University, New Delhi

Partition and some truths

The argument that all Muslims are responsible for Partition is a fundamentally flawed one. Partition was a Muslim elite-driven project, mainly supported by Muslim landlords in North India. Among others, the Hindu right's dream project, of a Hindu Rashtra (which was already taking institutional shape by the late 1920s) was a major trigger that caused alienation among the Muslim elites in addition to the colonial state's divide and rule policy. It was not just some Muslim elites. The legendary southern leader Periyar championed Dravidistan as he was convinced that the political freedom that India's nationalist elites, largely drawn from an upper caste background, were working for, would not bring genuine freedom to the oppressed and marginalised people of the South.

The truth is that a vast majority of Indian Muslims were fiercely opposed to Partition and chose to stay back in India. Besides this, tall figures such as Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Sheikh Abdullah, and many others including the religious leadership of Deoband were opposed to Partition.

The most decisive blow to Jinnah's two-nation theory came from iconic secular Muslim leader Bangabandhu Mujibur Rahman, who gave leadership to the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971. If the Hindu right seeks to justify Muslim exclusion owing to Partition, it needs to be blamed for deliberately failing to appreciate the resistance that Muslims launched against Partition and who have demonstrated their love for India with sacrifices since then. To put it bluntly, this argument of Partition as the basis for Muslim exclusion in the CAA 2019 reflects the Hindu right's vengeance in the form of collective punishment to Muslims.

> The issue of Muslim exclusion in the Citizenship (Amendment) Act needs to be seen in the broader context of right-wing politics

On top of it, a vast number of the Muslim masses and Muslim middle class remained confused on how to respond to the new situation arising out of the creation of Pakistan. According to Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, when he learnt that the Muslim League was inciting all Muslim officials working in the Central Secretariat, New Delhi, to leave for Pakistan, he pushed the government of India to issue a circular that Muslims who would stay back in India would be given their rights. Azad's effort was fully backed by Jawaharlal Nehru and Lord Mountbatten. As a result, 23,233 officers and sub-ordinate staff in the Central Secretariat who had opted to move to Pakistan changed their mind and applied to remain in India; of them, 19,676 personnel were retained. Similarly, another 16,090 Muslims who had applied to move to Pakistan, had left the job. Of them, 13,018 Muslims were re-employed when they changed their mind. This is just a small example to show the enormity of confusion the average Muslim was going through at the time of Partition.

The argument of persecution

There is truth in the Hindu right's argument that religious minorities in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan experience enormous persecution. So do some Muslim sects such as the Ahmedias. Even the Nobel Prize winning Pakistani physicist, Professor Abdus Salam, was not spared due to his Ahmadi heritage. Indeed, some leadership of the Shia community considered the Pakistan project as Sunnistan and were fiercely opposed to it. Also, the argument that India's so-called secular governments did not address this issue with urgency is also valid. In a nutshell, it is true that India was partitioned on religious lines but all Muslims cannot be blamed for it. Ayesha Jalal captures the complexity of Partition in a preface to her classic, T*he Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (1994) in the following words: "Partition of 1947 was no more than a partial solution to the minority problem in the sub-continent. The point has been made more poignant by the resurgence of communal tensions in India and repercussions in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Apart from targeting their own non-Muslim minorities, citizens of Pakistan and Bangladesh can merely look helplessly across borders at the plight of India's Muslim minority under siege."

In this unfolding national debate on the CAA, 2019, the most unfortunate intervention has been from the Delhi Chief Minister, Arvind Kejriwal. To abuse asylum seekers who are genuine victims of hardline theocratic politics as criminals is xenophobic. This is identical to depicting them as termites. It is perhaps the Aam Aadmi Party leader's ambivalence over how to address the Muslim question and secularism issue that has encouraged him to resort to such xenophobic arguments.

The canvas of the right

This Muslim exclusion issue in the CAA 2019 needs to be seen in the broader context of the Hindu right's ideological politics. The decision not to field Muslim candidates by the Bharatiya Janata Party, the witch hunt of *madrasas* particularly in Uttar Pradesh and Assam, the singling out of *darghas* and masjids for their legal status when combined with Muslim exclusion in the CAA 2019 has more to it than the context of Partition. What is unfolding, slowly and steadily, is a comprehensive ideological project of a de-Islamisation of India. And neither the secular political class nor Muslims have any well-crafted political response to it.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Arrest

The tactics of evasion adopted by Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in side-stepping repeated summons by the Enforcement Directorate have boomeranged on him. It is an irony that an erstwhile member of the Anna Hazare movement has deviated from the path shown by his mentor.

B. Gurumurthy,
Bengaluru

Title, talent, responses

The reactions by some well-known musicians in the field of Carnatic music to the title of Sangita Kalanidhi having been bestowed on fellow musician T.M. Krishna, are in bad taste. The President, The Music Academy, Madras, N. Murali has been courteous enough to issue a clarification that no extraneous factors were involved in the decision to confer the title/award on Mr. Krishna. Mr. Krishna has the right to voice his opinion in a democratic country. As the saying goes. no individual is greater than the organisation. To say that it is the dream of every artiste to perform in the annual conference of the prestigious Academy will be the understatement of the century. The Sangita Kalanidhi is an ultimate honour and the whole fraternity is proud of the recipient and the giver.

K.V. Vasudevan,
Chennai

That some artistes have decided to withdraw from participating in the Academy's 2024 conference while others have decided to return awards is not in good taste. As clarified by the President of the Music Academy, there were no extraneous considerations that were instrumental in the title/award decision. No individual is greater than the institution.

Sundaresan Suresh,
Chennai

The allegations that Mr. Krishna has "vilified the Carnatic music fraternity" cannot be the reason to oppose the selection. The Ramon Magsaysay award winner has been working towards creating a more inclusive egalitarian space for music.

R. Sivakumar,
Chennai

It is unfortunate that the Music Academy should hurt the feelings of its *rasikas*. Mr. Krishna is a very accomplished musician but he has scant respect for the rich traditions established by Carnatic music stalwarts.

Kangayam R. Narasimhan,
Chennai

Sajad, the brother of Azad Yousuf Kumar, in Poshwan village in Awantipora, a sub-district of Pulwama district in Jammu and Kashmir. Kumar went to Russia to work as a helper in the army. NISSAR AHMAD

The dream chasers who got inducted into a war

Scores of Indian men who left for Russia in the hope of well-paying jobs and a secure future, instead find themselves in the battlefield on the border with Ukraine. At least two have died and a few have managed to return, but many are desperately waiting to come back. **Vijaita Singh** visits the worried families and reports on the men who were sold dreams by YouTube videos

A few years ago, Raja Bano's son, Azad Yousuf Kumar, 31, travelled to Srinagar to learn English. The family of potters lives in Poshwan village in Awantipora, a sub-district of Pulwama district in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Located off the Jammu-Srinagar national highway, a mud track leads to Poshwan. Bano sits on the floor of an empty room in the two-storey house.

Kumar, who dreamed of a successful life, went to Srinagar, just 30 kilometres away, where he taught himself the language that he believed would take him places; learning English is one of the most common ways of seeking social mobility in India. With the help of a consultancy firm, Kumar then found himself a job in Saudi Arabia, says Bano, 56, a home-maker. He worked as a cashier only to return after two years.

"He was the first in the family to get a passport," says a proud Sajad, 36, Kumar's brother. "But he came back from Saudi Arabia as he was earning only ₹27,000 a month there. He got married and became a father. Unfortunately, his son, who was nearly one and a half years, died. Kumar was disturbed by his death and became a cleric at the local mosque."

When Kumar's wife got pregnant again, he came across a YouTube channel called Baba Vlogs, promising people a decent life in Russia. Sajad says Kumar withdrew ₹3 lakh from their younger brother Irshad's account without telling anyone. Kumar paid an agent and signed up for a job in Russia.

Kumar first went to Dubai, where he met 11 other Indians. On December 14, 2023, the group travelled on tourist visas to Moscow to work as helpers with the Russian army. At the airport, they were received by two Indian agents and taken to a hotel. They met Russian officials and signed a contract written in Russian.

"He was told that he would have to remove rubble, dig trenches, and assist their army as part of his job," says Sajad. "He was also taught how to handle weapons. He even sustained a bullet injury during a training session. After he recovered, the Russians sent him to the Ukraine border to fight their war. Now, my brother is caught in the middle of a war that we have nothing to do with."

Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022. What many believed would be a swift military operation has dragged on for more than two years. Kumar is among the scores of Indian men who left the country in the hope of a well-paying job and a secure future, but find themselves fighting the largest land war in Europe since the end of World War II.

Hope and despair

At least two men – Hemil Mangukiya, 23, from Surat, Gujarat, and Mohammad Asfan, 31, from Hyderabad, Telangana – who were part of Kumar's group have been killed. Their bodies were brought to India on March 16, several days after their death. Another resident of Jammu and Kashmir, Zahoor Ahmad, 32, is missing. His family says they have not heard from him since January 1, when he informed them that he would be gone for training for a few months.

> My brother went to earn a decent living and returned in a body bag
>
> **IMRAN**
> Brother of Mohammad Asfan who was killed in Russia

Asfan's brother, Imran, was the first to alert the Indian authorities to middlemen taking advantage of desperate Indians seeking better livelihoods abroad. Imran approached Hyderabad Member of Parliament Asaduddin Owaisi on January 23 asking for help after Arbab Husain, a resident of Kasganj in rural Uttar Pradesh, who had also been sent to fight the war, informed his family that Asfan had been with him. Owaisi wrote to the Ministry of External Affairs seeking the government's intervention. The family did not hear from the government until March 8, when the Indian mission in Moscow informed them that Asfan has died in an explosion.

"My brother went to earn a decent living and returned in a body bag," says a distraught Imran, who mobilised the families of other Indians to pursue the issue with the Ministry.

There had been several reports of Nepalese citizens being killed in Russia, but the Ministry had not put out a formal advisory cautioning Indians against taking up jobs of security helpers. It was only after *The Hindu* first reported on February 20 that Indians were being forced to fight alongside the Russian army that the Ministry issued a statement. It said that India had approached the Russian authorities for the "early discharge" of Indians and added that it was aware that a few Indians had signed up for support jobs with the Russian army. The official spokesperson of the Ministry, Randhir Jaiswal, says about 20 Indians have sought help from the government to return.

The father of Azad Yousuf Kumar shows his son's photo. NISSAR AHMAD

Husain, 22, managed to escape from the war zone feigning illness. Hiding somewhere in Moscow, he has been surviving on one meal a day. Husain's passport is with his employers and he has no money. For the last two months, he has spent his days oscillating between hope and despair, waiting for a call from the Indian Embassy.

Like many others, Husain was also inspired by Baba Vlogs. He took a personal loan of ₹3 lakh to travel last November to Russia, where he was promised the job of a helper. He was assured a salary of ₹2.5 lakh per month.

"I did not know what was written in the contract," he says over a call. "I signed it as I trusted the agents who I met through Baba Vlogs." The contract, he learned later, said that he could be sent to the battlefield and would not be allowed to leave for a year.

"I don't have any documents. They took my passport. For the two months I served in the army, they paid me ₹1 lakh, though the amount due is ₹4 lakh. The Indian Embassy says it can arrange my return only when it gets my documents back from the Russians," Husain says.

After graduating from Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar University in Agra in 2022, Husain scoured the Internet for good career opportunities. He was interviewed online for a short-term project in Qatar during the football world cup for which he was promised ₹80,000 along with food and accommodation. He was thrilled.

"Before applying for the job in Qatar, I had worked in Delhi at a mobile phone production company for five years. I was paid ₹7,500 a month. The maximum salary I could have earned in India was ₹10,000-₹15,000 a month. My father is an accountant. My mother passed away a few years ago. I knew that I would be able to earn a decent amount only if I left the country," he says.

The man who runs Baba vlogs

On March 7, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) announced that it had exposed an organised network of traffickers who lured Indians through social media for 'well-paying' jobs in Russia. It said the "trafficked Indian nationals were trained in combat roles and deployed at front bases in the Russia-Ukraine war zone against their wishes." The CBI conducted searches at 13 locations in Delhi, Thiruvananthapuram, Mumbai, Ambala, Chandigarh, Madurai, and Chennai. "So far, around 35 instances of victims being sent abroad have been established," it said.

One of the suspects named by the CBI in its First Information Report is Faisal Khan, 37, from Mumbai, who runs Baba Vlogs. The channel, which is now blocked in India, has more than 4 lakh subscribers.

Khan is based in Dubai. He says on a call that he inspired others like him, that is, people from modest backgrounds, to hope for good money and a stable life through his vlogs. He claims that he has helped 500 people get jobs as waiters, delivery boys, and parking attendants, among others, in Dubai and Europe in the past seven years.

"I am a Class 7 dropout. I used to sell fish in Mumbai. Sometimes, municipal authorities took the stock away and sometimes it rained. I contacted many agents in Mumbai who took money but never sent me to Dubai. In 2008, a friend helped me get a job as a parking attendant here. Later, I got the job of a medical representative and also sold luxury watches," he says.

When Khan returned to India in 2014, he started posting videos on YouTube promoting tourism in the Gulf country. "One day, someone posted a comment saying I should educate my viewers on how to get jobs in Dubai. That was when I started guiding people," he recalls.

Sensing the potential and reach of his videos,

> These jobs may be menial, but they give people like us an opportunity to earn a few lakhs in a short span of time and then buy a house.
>
> **FAISAL KHAN**
> Founder, Baba Vlogs

Khan started consultancy work in 2018. Last year, he says he got a call from a man called Moin who invited him to Russia and asked him to shoot a video about the various job opportunities in the country, such as security helpers and taxi drivers. Khan travelled to St Petersburg in Russia to shoot the video. He then got several requests seeking details of these jobs. He contends that he has helped send at least 35 people to Russia.

"I was clearly told that these men will not be sent to the battlefield," he says. "However, when I started getting distress calls in January from the men and their families that they were being forced to fight, I decided to help them and vowed not to send anyone else to Russia. I called Moin, who also approached the Indian Embassy seeking cancellations of their contracts."

Khan says not everyone wants to come back, though. "Six people have managed to come back. But many do not want to. I helped three Indians get jobs in a chocolate factory in Russia," he says.

After spending a year in Russia, the men could have made ₹12 lakh and even got an opportunity to obtain a permanent residence permit for their families, he says. "For people like us, it was unthinkable that we could ever own a house. No bank will give us loans. These jobs may be menial, but they give people like us an opportunity to earn a few lakhs in a short span of time and then buy a house," Khan says.

His initiative has come at a personal cost. After the CBI case against him followed by the media glare, Khan's wife left him.

The horrors of war

Mohammad Sarfaraz, 31, a resident of Kolkata, was one of the lucky few to escape Russia. He recounts stories of the horrors of war. "I saw many people with limbs missing, a ear gone. Many had their fingers amputated. They had all been injured during the war," he says.

Sarfaraz, who went to Russia as a security helper last year, says he was able to befriend the watch and ward staff at the Ryazan military camp as he was "well-behaved". On the night of January 17, Sarfaraz told the staff that he was stepping out to buy something. "I ran, hired a taxi, and reached the Indian Embassy in Moscow," he recalls. "I was told that since I had signed a contract and did not have my passport, they could not help me as doing so would be against Russian law. I was asked to wait."

Faisal Khan told Sarfaraz that the job included basic arms training and that he would be asked to load and unload missiles and weapons.

"The five-star hotel in Kolkata where I used to work till June 2023 refused to extend my contract. I was jobless. No one was ready to match the salary I was getting at the hotel. I came across Baba Vlogs and called the numbers provided on the channel. I paid ₹1.5 lakh as advance. They arranged our papers and I reached Moscow in December 2023," he says. Sarfaraz says the agent in Russia sought his bank account details and wanted a share from his salary.

After escaping from the camp, he stayed at a dormitory that agreed to take him without a passport. "The Indian Embassy officials asked me to go back to the camp as they did not have clearance from the Russian authorities to leave me. I begged them not to send me back as desertion means death in Russia. After I fled, they sent one of my friends to jail for a day. Had I gone back, I would have been beaten, made to sleep on the floor, and sent to the battlefield. I gave all the evidence I had, such as video clips, to the Embassy officials to prove that I had been duped. Finally, I got an emergency certificate and an exit visa and I returned to India on February 24," he says.

All the victims say they were at the mercy of the commanders. An escape from the front lines was next to impossible as there were check posts every 2-3 km. They were told that they would have to work in eight-hour shifts. "There was no break. You are always staring at death. The contract said that we cannot take a holiday for six months," says Sarfaraz.

Their return was incumbent on Russia honouring India's request. Mohammad Mustafa's brother, Sameer Ahmed, is in Russia. Mustafa, who lives in Kalaburgi in Karnataka, says the family had no idea that Russia was at war, and only expected Ahmed to earn some money. Scared that Ahmed is stuck there, they keep calling the Indian mission in Moscow. A worker is allowed access to his phone depending on his equation with the commander, he adds. "We have been speaking to Ahmed through WhatsApp calls. In his last video, he said that he was being sent to the war zone as reinforcement," he says.

It was Ahmed who saw Hemil Mangukiya from Surat die in a Ukrainian air strike on February 21. "I was digging a trench and Hemil was learning how to fire, around 150 metres away. Suddenly, we heard some noise. I hid in the trench along with two other Indians and some Russian soldiers. The missiles struck and the earth shook. We got out after some time and found Hemil dead. I was the one who put his body in the truck," says Ahmed over a call. He managed to inform Hemil's family only days later when he got access to Internet and his phone.

Sarafraz says the Russians bury bodies in trenches. "I know of many Nepalese and Cuban citizens whose families will never know what happened with them. They will remain 'missing' in official records." Sarafraz says he has learnt his lesson the hard way. "The place offers you nothing but death," he says.

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From Page One

Arvind Kejriwal sent to ED custody till March 28

Lawyers representing Mr. Kejriwal alleged that the Central agency's allegations are a cut-paste job and questioned the timing of his arrest.

"If the ED had material against him since it has first summoned him in 2023... why did the agency wait this long to arrest him just on the eve of Lok Sabha elections?" said senior advocate Vikram Chaudhuri, demanding that the ED remove its "mask" and reveal whom it actually represents.

Senior advocate A.M. Singhvi, also appearing for Mr. Kejriwal, opposed the ED's remand plea and said that the agency had to prove in court the necessity to arrest Mr. Kejriwal. "Even before the first vote is cast, the results are there... you are creating a non-level playing field," he argued.

A delegation of the INDIA bloc also submitted a memorandum to the Election Commission alleging "unrelenting, blatant and illegal deployment of Central agencies" by the ruling BJP to stifle the Opposition parties.

Earlier in the day, in his first reaction after his arrest, Mr. Kejriwal said his life is dedicated to the nation whether he is inside or outside the jail.
(With PTI inputs)

T.N. Governor Ravi re-inducts Ponmudy

In the last decade, the people of India witnessed the "dithering of democracy, withering of federalism and misadventures to put spikes before the functioning of sovereign governments elected by the people and giving age-old traditions a go by", Mr. Stalin contended. Underlining that the 2024 Lok Sabha election was "crucial to save the democracy and uphold the Constitution," Mr. Stalin said: "Let us strive hard to prevent the brazen abuse of the power by fascist forces threatening to ruin our glorious nation."

On Thursday, Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud slammed the Governor for "defying the Supreme Court". The Governor had declined to administer the oath of office to Mr. Ponmudy despite a top court order, on March 11, suspending his conviction in a disproportionate assets case.

On Friday, Attorney-General R. Venkataramani said the Governor had thought through the affair and decided to invite Mr. Ponmudy to be sworn in. He clarified that the Governor had no intention to disregard any orders of the Supreme Court.

Senior advocate P. Wilson, for the State, cut to the chase by submitting that "parliamentary democracy survives because of the Supreme Court".

On the recommendation of the CM, Mr. Ponmudy was given the Higher Education portfolio, including Technical Education, Electronics, Science and Technology that he held earlier before his disqualification.

BJP, BJD to go solo in Odisha as talks fail

In a post on X, BJD organising secretary Pranab Prakash Das said, "BJD will continue to take decisions keeping people of Odisha and their welfare always in the forefront, in the true spirit of cooperative federalism and statesmanship required for nation building."

A senior BJP leader involved in Odisha affairs told *The Hindu* that the relationship between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik was one of "mutual respect and regard". However, the BJP had strong feelings with regard to the BJD's internal issues.

Mr. Patnaik's long-time aide V.K. Pandian recently left government service and formally joined the BJD, and is being seen by many as the man who may succeed the BJD chief. "Whether or not he is acceptable to a large section of the voters in Odisha, as he is from Tamil Nadu, is still not clear. The BJP did not want to be a party, or to be a means of electorally endorsing that succession, especially since, for the last few years, we have been the principal Opposition in the State. It seemed that in this deal, the BJD would gain much, a non-election, basically, and we would be stuck with justifying the BJD's succession plan," the leader said.

The real test for the BJP now will be to convince the electorate that this was an alliance that they weighed and found wanting, as well as justify their reasons for walking out of the negotiations. In a way, the BJP will have to combat not just Mr. Patnaik but also his succession plan, after having been seen to be on board with it.

India to double aid to Bhutan to ₹10,000 cr.

Mr. Modi landed in Bhutan's Paro valley on Friday morning. After driving to Thimphu, he received a ceremonial welcome, an audience with Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar and then with his father and former King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who is believed to be still extremely influential in matters of Bhutan's foreign policy.

The visit by Mr. Modi, after the electoral Model Code of Conduct has been put in place, is considered unusual, given that in the past Prime Ministers haven't made bilateral visits or made major policy announcements with financial implications during this period.

The roller-coaster ride of the Kejriwal case in Supreme Court

Delhi CM's lawyers rushed from one courtroom to another to table their case, only to withdraw it hours later; Kejriwal's counsel eventually decided to try their luck at the Rouse Avenue Court where he was to be produced that afternoon

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

Arvind Kejriwal being escorted by security personnel in the Rouse Avenue Court on Friday. ANI

In a series of events with many twists and turns on Friday, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal urged the Supreme Court to hear his case against his arrest on charges of corruption in an excise policy case, only to suddenly withdraw from the top court shortly after judges agreed to reconvene a Special Bench for him.

The Aam Aadmi Party's legal team rushed to the Supreme Court late on Thursday within moments of the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) arrest of Mr. Kejriwal.

The party leaders had tweeted that their lawyers were pushing for a hearing the same night. However, the Chief Minister spent the night in ED custody with no word from the Supreme Court.

On Friday morning, senior advocate A.M. Singhvi, for Mr. Kejriwal, requested Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud for an urgent hearing as the court would be closed for Holi holidays the whole of next week. March 22 is the last working day before vacations.

However, the Chief Justice advised Mr. Singhvi to rush next door to the courtroom of Justice Sanjiv Khanna, who was at the time heading the Special Bench which was hearing a separate petition filed by Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) MLC K. Kavitha to quash her recent arrest by the ED in the same excise policy case.

Minutes later, Mr. Singhvi and his team of lawyers reached Justice Khanna's court, only to find that the Special Bench had risen after refusing to entertain Ms. Kavitha's plea for bail.

When Justice Khanna returned in a two-judge Bench combination with Justice Dipankar Datta, Mr. Singhvi told the court what had transpired in the Chief Justice's courtroom.

Justice Khanna eventually agreed to reconvene the earlier Special Bench of himself, Justices M.M. Sundresh and Bela M. Trivedi after his regular list of cases of the day was over.

Plea withdrawn

Barely an hour later, Mr. Singhvi reappeared in Justice Khanna's court, this time with a request to allow him to withdraw the petition and try his luck before the Rouse Avenue Magistrate before whom Mr. Kejriwal was scheduled to be produced at 2 p.m. on Friday.

The court permitted him to withdraw the petition. A few minutes later, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, for the ED, also made an oral mentioning, saying he wanted to clear the air regarding what Mr. Singhvi said.

Mr. Mehta said he had earlier given clear instructions to the ED officers not to produce Mr. Kejriwal before the Magistrate as the Chief Minister's petition was pending in the top court. He indicated that the ED would have waited for the outcome of the Supreme Court hearing. However, Mr. Mehta said and Justice Khanna agreed that with the Chief Minister withdrawing his petition from the top court, the coast was clear to produce Mr. Kejriwal before the Magistrate at 2 p.m.

The issues that may eventually come up in the case of Mr. Kejriwal would include whether he could continue to be in the post behind bars.

Parties across the spectrum have condemned the arrest as politically motivated with the ED being used by the Central regime as a tool to crush the Opposition.

Mr. Kejriwal's questioning and arrest had followed hours after the Delhi High Court declined to grant him interim protection from coercive action. The High Court had referred to the multiple ED summons gone unanswered by the Chief Minister. It had posted the case on April 22.

Result of his own actions: Anna Hazare on arrest

Abhinay Deshpande
MUMBAI

Social activist Anna Hazare on Friday said that he had cautioned Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, currently arrested in the excise policy case, against involving in such policy matters.

Mr. Hazare, a key figure in the Lokpal movement alongside Mr. Kejriwal in the early 2010s, stated that the Delhi Chief Minister's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) was a consequence of his own actions.

"I advised him that our focus should not be on crafting excise policy. It's common knowledge that alcohol is detrimental. I urged him to steer clear of this issue but he proceeded with the policy," he said.

The social activist said that he was deeply disappointed that Mr. Kejriwal, once a colleague in advocating against alcohol, was now formulating liquor policies. "His arrest is a result of his own actions," he said at his village, Ralegan-Siddhi in Ahmednagar.

INDIA bloc leaders reach out to EC, highlight 'misuse' of Central agencies

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A multi-party delegation of the INDIA bloc was put together late on Thursday night, soon after Kejriwal's arrest. ANI

A day after the arrest of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by the Enforcement Directorate in the excise policy case, a delegation of INDIA bloc leaders on Friday called on the Election Commission (EC) to allege "unrelenting, blatant and illegal deployment of Central Agencies" by the ruling BJP to target the Opposition parties.

The delegation presented a memorandum in which the INDIA bloc leaders submitted a list of 10 instances of agencies going after the Opposition parties since January and the absence of a level playing field in the elections.

The delegation included Congress general secretary K.C. Venugopal, his colleague Abhishek Singhvi, Trinamool Congress's Derek O'Brien and Nadimul Haque, CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury, DMK's P. Wilson and Javed Ali of the Samajwadi Party among others.

While the JMM, RJD and Shiv Sena (UBT) could not send any representatives, the Opposition leaders said all parties supported the memorandum.

This is the first time that the Trinamool has shared a common platform with the Congress after seat-sharing didn't fructify and the party decided to go alone in West Bengal.

"We pointed out this is not a normal complaint, it is a larger issue of affecting, impairing, undermining, and sabotaging the basic structure of the Constitution," Mr. Singhvi said.

He pointed out that level playing field is "the heart and soul" of free and fair elections, which, in turn, is at the heart of democracy itself.

The Congress leaders said that 20-year-old cases were being revived to target Opposition leaders. "The Election Commission has been given the responsibility and is the police to protect this level playing field. We asked the Election Commission to interfere," Mr. Singhvi said.

Among the instances mentioned in the memorandum were CBI registering an FIR against Trinamool's Mahua Moitra, raids and arrest of leaders of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), arrest of former Bihar Chief Minister Lalu Prasad's aide, arrest of JMM leader Hemant Soren and freezing of the Congress's accounts.

HC rejects Congress plea against tax reassessment

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

In a huge setback to the Congress ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, the Delhi High Court on Friday rejected its pleas challenging the reassessment proceedings initiated against it by the Income Tax department.

The court said the I-T department "appears to have collated substantial and concrete evidence warranting further scrutiny and examination". It also commented that the party has "chosen to approach this court only a few days before the time for completion of assessment would expire and at the proverbial fag end of the proceedings".

The Congress has challenged the initiation of proceedings under Section 153C of the Income Tax Act for assessment pertaining to assessment years 2014-15 to 2016-17.

SC says BRS leader Kavitha cannot take shortcut to bail, asks her to move trial court

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Court issues notice to ED on a writ petition filed by Kavitha seeking to quash her arrest in the case

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a plea for bail by Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) MLC K. Kavitha, arrested by the Enforcement Directorate, in connection with the Delhi excise policy case.

A three-judge Bench headed by Justice Sanjiv Khanna advised Ms. Kavitha, represented by senior advocate Kapil Sibal, to approach the trial court for bail. The Bench asked the trial court, if an application for bail is filed, to decide it expeditiously.

"Merely because she is a political person or someone who can afford to approach the Supreme Court directly does not mean she can bypass statutory routes. For bail, you have to go through the trial court," Justice Khanna told Mr. Sibal.

The top court issued notice to the ED on a writ petition filed by Ms. Kavitha seeking to quash her arrest in the case.

The Bench tagged it with other petitions challenging the larger questions regarding ED's sweeping powers under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act to raid, summon and arrest persons.

On July 27, 2022, the top court upheld the core amendments to the Act which had enhanced ED's powers. Multiple petitions, including one by Congress leader Karti Chidambaram, seeking a review of the 2022 verdict are pending before Justice Khanna's Special Bench. Ms. Kavitha's petition has been attached to this batch, which would likely be listed in July 2024.

Ms. Kavitha, daughter of former Telangana Chief Minister K. Chandrashekar Rao, was remanded in ED custody till Saturday in the case.

She has urged the court to "quash and set aside the entire action taken by the ED leading to the arrest of the petitioner as the same is wholly non-est; illegal, arbitrary, unconstitutional, contrary to the undertaking tendered before this court and also being violative of the postulates of Section 19 of Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 especially qua a woman".

Ms. Kavitha was arrested by the federal anti-money laundering agency from her Banjara Hills residence in Hyderabad on Friday amid protests by BRS supporters.

Can Arvind Kejriwal continue to be CM while in custody?

NEWS ANALYSIS

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

Questions are being asked about whether Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal can continue to occupy a public office that demands a high degree of morality after being remanded in judicial custody.

Earlier judgments in the Supreme Court and High Courts have concluded that constitutional morality, good governance, and constitutional trust are the basic norms for holding a public office.

A recent judgment by the Madras High Court in *S. Ramachandran versus V. Senthilbalaji* referred to arguments made in court on whether a Minister must forfeit his right to occupy a public office that demands a high degree of morality if he is accused of a "financial scandal". Mr. Senthilbalaji, a former Tamil Nadu Minister, was arrested by the ED on money-laundering charges last year. He continued to be a Minister without portfolio while he was in judicial custody.

The High Court heard arguments on whether he "has virtually forfeited his office as a Minister on account of being arrested and detained in prison".

The arguments referred to a 2014 Constitution Bench judgment of the Supreme Court in *Manoj Narula versus Union of India*, which had held that the basic norm for holding a public office was constitutional morality, that is, to avoid acting in a manner contradictory to the rule of law. The second norm was good governance. It was argued in the Madras High Court that "the government has to rise above narrow private interests or parochial political outlook and aim at doing good for the larger public interest". The third was constitutional trust, that is, to uphold the high degree of morality attached to a public office.

The Madras High Court judgment highlighted discussions by lawyers in court about the practical difficulties of being a Minister while in custody. For one, a "Minister sitting in prison cannot ask the Secretary of the State to get the files concerning any of the departments without breaching the oath of office", it was pointed out.

The High Court agreed that these were arguments based "more on the concern for public morality or constitutional morality" as Mr. Senthilbalaji did not "completely suffer a disqualification as an MLA under the Representation of the People Act, 1951".

However, the High Court had agreed that citizens expect that persons in power had high standards of moral conduct.

Kejriwal brought to justice: Smriti Irani

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday welcomed a Delhi court's decision to send Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal to the ED's custody, saying the "kingpin of the crime" had finally been brought to justice.

Addressing a press conference in Delhi, Union Minister and BJP leader Smriti Irani said that after the court's order, the country was convinced that nobody was above the law. "Kejriwal came with a promise of change and transparency. What he sought to do was use the State instrument to defraud the public exchequer," she charged.

"Today, he stands before the law to be adjudged and prosecuted, and then made to pay for his crimes... This is the true face of the kingpin of the crime," she alleged.

Cong. clears names of four sitting MPs from T.N.

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Central Election Committee of the Congress on Friday cleared four of the nine Lok Sabha seats that the party would be contesting in Tamil Nadu in alliance with Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK).

There has been no official announcement but sources said the party would be repeating Karti Chidambaram from Sivaganga, S. Jothimani from the Karur Lok Sabha seat, Vijay Vasanth from Kanniyakumari, and Manickam Tagore from Virudhunagar. Discussions on the other five seats also took place but their final clearance is pending. However, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge could clear the names for the Thiruvallur and Krishnagiri Lok Sabha seats later, a source indicated.

The Congress is contesting 10 Lok Sabha seats (including Puducherry) as part of the DMK-led alliance in Tamil Nadu.

Activists seek SC-monitored probe into poll bond issue

Petitioners describe the scheme as the biggest scam of Independent India, which has exposed the corporate-political nexus and big-ticket corruption; demand independent SIT investigation

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A day after the entire data on electoral bonds were made public, activists and petitioners said on Friday that an independent Special Investigation Team (SIT) should be formed to probe all aspects of the now-scrapped scheme.

Claiming that electoral bonds had emerged as the biggest scam of Independent India, lawyer Prashant Bhushan said at a press conference: "There were no money trails on 2G and coal scams. But the Supreme Court ordered a SC-monitored probe. What came out in electoral bonds has money trail, and there should be an SC-monitored probe".

The Supreme Court scrapped the electoral bond scheme on February 15 and asked the State Bank of India (SBI) to share all details on bonds sold and redeemed from April 2019.

Prashant Bhushan, Nitin Seth, Jagdeep Chhokar and Anjali Bhardwaj addressing the media on Friday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

On Thursday, the Election Commission published the data submitted by the SBI on electoral bonds, which contained alphanumeric numbers that could match the donors with the political parties who received the bond money.

'Donors got contracts'

At the press conference, Mr. Bhushan also alleged that 33 companies that donated ₹1,751 crore got contracts worth ₹3.7 lakh crore, while 41 companies that faced action by the CBI, the ED and the Income Tax Department contributed ₹2,471 core to the BJP. Of this, ₹1,698 crore was given after raids, he claimed. There were also 30 shell companies that donated around ₹143 crore.

He said that in 49 cases, contracts worth ₹62,000 crore were given after the companies donated around ₹580 crore to the ruling party. In 192 cases, he said, ₹551 crore were donated before the contracts were awarded.

Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar, founder member of the Association of Democratic Reforms, the chief petitioner in the case, said this data are "proof of the corporate-political nexus that all of us know exists but did not have any proof of".

He said the fight had been for ensuring transparency in electoral funding. "All that was spent was public money."

RTI activist Anjali Bharadwaj, who is also on the board of Common Cause, one of the petitioners in the case, said the fact that 95% of the bonds sold were of the highest denomination of ₹1,000 crore shows that there is big-ticket corruption involved. She also questioned whether the SBI was working independently.

OBC leaders to support Congress and INDIA bloc to ensure 'social justice'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

An umbrella organisation of backward outfits, representing the interest of other backward classes (OBC), called on Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Friday and announced its "unconditional support" to the INDIA bloc.

Former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi was also present at the meeting in Mr. Kharge's official residence.

The leaders of the grand alliance of backward organisations or 'OBC Bhartiya Gathbandhan' was led by its chairman and former MP Raj Kumar Saini.

The development comes a day after senior leader and Congress Working Committee member Anand Sharma's letter to Mr. Kharge surfaced in the public domain.

In the letter, Mr. Sharma questioned the Congress' promise to hold caste census and pointed out that it could be construed as "disrespecting the legacy of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi" who didn't endorse the politics of caste.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and party leader Rahul Gandhi with SC, ST and OBC leaders of the INDIA bloc on Friday. PTI

Talking to reporters, Mr. Gandhi reiterated his stance that a nationwide caste census was essential to ensure that communities get their fair share in governance in proportion to their numbers in the society.

Mr. Saini said various organisations had been raising the same demand for a long time. He said Mr. Gandhi had already stated the party's stance on the fair share in the decision-making process and social justice. That was why they decided to carry forward the fight together with the Congress.

Mr. Kharge thanked the 'grand alliance' for its unconditional support.

Earlier, Congress general secretary Deepak Babaria, who played a key role in getting these organisations to support the party, claimed that there was unanimity among the organisations to support the Congress and the INDIA bloc to ensure social justice.

All signs point to BJP's rout in Bengal, says Derek O'Brien

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Derek O'Brien

The Trinamool Congress will get double the number of Lok Sabha seats that the BJP will secure in West Bengal, the party's senior leader and Rajya Sabha MP Derek O'Brien asserted on Friday.

In an interaction with presspersons in New Delhi, Mr. O'Brien said all signs point to the BJP's rout in the State but stopped short of giving a number.

In the 2019 general election, the BJP had won 18 seats. The Trinamool's tally, on the other hand, went down from 24 seats in 2014 to 22 in 2019.

To back his claim, Mr. O'Brien pointed out that the BJP has managed to announce candidates for only 20 of the 42 seats in the State and they had to replace one candidate – Bhojpuri singer Pawan Singh.

"They are yet to declare the candidates for six seats that go to polls in the first phase on April 19. In contrast, we declared all the 42 candidates in a single tranche on March 10," Mr. O'Brien said.

Pointing at the disarray in the BJP, the Trinamool leader said that over the past two weeks, the BJP State leadership has made three trips to Delhi to sort out their problems. The BJP, he alleged, is unable to find candidates with several persons whom they approached rejecting to fight on a BJP ticket.

"This election is clearly a contest between 'Modi's guarantee' that comes with no warranty and 'Didi's guarantee' that the government delivers," Mr. O'Brien quipped.

The party feels that the Sandeshkhali episode of violence will not adversely impact the Trinamool's electoral fortunes. "We were quick to act against our own leaders, unlike the BJP that has not taken any action against the likes of [BJP MP] Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh," he added.

Governor is running office parallel to EC: Trinamool

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

The Trinamool Congress on Friday lodged a complaint with the Election Commission of India (EC) against Governor C.V. Ananda Bose for allegedly interfering with the Lok Sabha election process. In a letter addressed to the Chief Election Commissioner, the party alleged that the Governor was running an office parallel to the EC.

The party said that Raj Bhavan has lodged a new portal '*Log Sabha*' to listen to the grievances of voters and directly connect with them during the election. "In such circumstances, we call upon you to restrain C.V. Ananda Bose from running a parallel electioneering system of so-called reporting of complaints and supervising the elections under the name and style of *Log Sabha*," the letter stated.

The Trinamool said, only "the EC has the power and the authority to conduct activities that might affect the conduct of polls deeming Hon'ble Governor's efforts to be unconstitutional in nature".

Lalu shortlists candidates, may field daughter Rohini from Saran Lok Sabha seat

Amarnath Tewary
PATNA

The *Mahagathbandhan* (grand alliance) led by the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) in Bihar is abuzz with talks that party chief Lalu Prasad is likely to field two of his daughters in the Lok Sabha election.

Mr. Prasad could field eldest daughter Misa Bharti from Patliputra seat again and second daughter Rohini Acharya from Saran, said party sources. If Ms. Acharya contests the poll, she will be the sixth member of Lalu's family to enter politics after Mr. Prasad, wife Rabri Devi, elder daughter Ms. Bharti and sons Tej Pratap Yadav and Tejashwi Yadav.

Singapore-based Ms. Acharya had donated one of her kidneys to Mr. Prasad in December 2022 and has since been active on social media on issues regarding her parents and the party. She was also present on the dais along with *Mahagathbandhan* leaders during the recently held *Jan Vishwas* rally in Patna on March 4, 2024.

Poll focus: Although no formal announcements were made, Lalu Prasad met various party leaders who could be fielded. ANI

At the rally, Mr. Prasad formally introduced Ms. Acharya to the gathered partymen, saying she had saved his life by donating her kidney.

Ms. Acharya will likely face BJP's sitting MP Rajiv Pratap Rudy in Saran. With a sizeable Yadav population, Saran has been a RJD stronghold and Mr. Prasad had represented the seat several times.

Meanwhile, though no formal announcements have been made, Mr. Prasad may have started shortlisting candidates for the election. Photographs of Mr. Prasad giving party symbol to some leaders have been shared on social media. Senior leader Jai Prakash Yadav was seen taking the party symbol from Mr. Prasad and other family members in one such social media post. Mr. Jai Prakash is the likely RJD candidate from Banka. Names of candidates for various other seats have also come out.

Also on Friday, one of the three Left parties part of the *Mahagathbandhan*, the Communist Party of India (CPI), announced three-time MLA from Bachhwara Assembly constituency in Begusarai, Awadhesh Kumar Rai, as candidate for the Begusarai LS seat. The announcement came after CPI national general secretary D. Raja met Mr. Prasad earlier in the day.

INBRIEF

Akhilesh meets Azam Khan in jail, discusses poll strategy

Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav on Friday met jailed party leader and 10-time former MLA Azam Khan in Sitapur district jail and alleged that the ruling BJP was attempting to humiliate and frame the jailed leader on fake charges. "Injustice is being done continuously to Mohammad Azam Khan Sahab," Mr. Yadav said. He was believed to have discussed the party's strategy for the 2024 parliamentary polls, with special focus on western Uttar Pradesh where Mr. Khan, a leading Muslim face of the party, enjoys influence among the minority electorate.

Clarify if Apna Dal (K) is part of the INDIA bloc: Pallavi Patel

Apna Dal (Kamerawadi) leader and Sirathu MLA Pallavi Patel on Friday said that the main parties of the INDIA bloc should clarify whether her party is still in the alliance or not, hinting that she was open to considering an alliance with the ruling BJP-led National Democratic Alliance. On March 21, Akhilesh Yadav declared that his Samajwadi Party's 2022 alliance with the Apna Dal (K) had been broken and the two parties were not allied for the upcoming election. Ms. Patel responded, saying, "... They should clarify if we are a part of the INDIA bloc or not. "

BJP candidate for byelection in Tripura announced

Syed Sajjad Ali
AGARTALA

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has on Friday nominated Dipak Majumder, the Mayor of Agartala Municipal Corporation, as their candidate for the upcoming byelection in the Ramnagar Assembly constituency.

This announcement came on the same day that Ratan Das of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) filed his nomination for the same.

The Ramnagar constituency in Agartala is one of the largest Assembly segments in Tripura and has a significant number of Muslim and tribal voters.

Manipur Congress selects candidates for two seats

The State will go to polls on April 19 and 26, against the backdrop of recent ethnic violence

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

The Manipur unit of the Congress on Friday identified the party's candidates for the two Lok Sabha constituencies in the State.

Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee president K. Meghachandra Singh told presspersons in the State's capital Imphal that Professor Angomcha Bimol Akoijam and former MLA Alfred Kanngam Arthur would be nominated from the Inner Manipur and Outer Manipur constituencies.

Former Chief Minister Okram Ibobi Singh and other senior party leaders were present at the briefing.

Professor Akoijam, from the Imphal Valley, teaches at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, while Mr. Arthur, based in the hill district of Ukhrul, has already hit the campaign trail.

The latter will face Timothy Zimik of the Nagaland-born Naga People's Front (NPF), an ally of the BJP in Manipur, in Outer Manipur. The constituency is currently held by the NPF's Lorho S. Pfoze.

Armed miscreants have over the past few days fired at Mr. Arthur at least thrice when he was campaigning.

The Outer Manipur constituency is reserved for the Scheduled Tribes. It encompasses 28 of the State's 60 Assembly segments. Of these 28 seats, 20 are spread across the hills inhabited by the Nagas and the Kuki-Zomi people. The remaining eight are located in the foothills of Imphal Valley and dominated by the non-tribal Meiteis.

The Inner Manipur seat comprises 32 Assembly segments in the Imphal Valley.

The BJP is yet to announce the names of its candidates.

The State will go for election in the first two phases on April 19 and 26 in the backdrop of the ethnic violence.

BJP to back regional partners in three northeastern States

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Friday announced that it will support its regional allies in four Lok Sabha constituencies across three States in the northeast.

These seats are Shillong and Tura in Meghalaya, Outer Manipur in Manipur, and the lone constituency in Nagaland.

"The BJP will extend support to the Lok Sabha candidates of the National People's Party (NPP) in Meghalaya, the Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) in Nagaland, and the Naga People's Front (NPF) in Manipur," Sambit Patra, the BJP's coordinator for the northeast, said. The three parties are constituents of the BJP-helmed National Democratic Alliance.

The NPP has fielded incumbent Agatha Sangma and Meghalaya Health Minister Ampareen Lyngdoh from the Tura and Shillong seats. The NDPP candidate from the Nagaland seat is Chumben Murry while the NPF's nominee from Outer Manipur is Kachui Timothy Zimik.

The BJP is also backing the candidates of its two ruling partners in Assam – the Asom Gana Parishad (Barpeta and Dhubri seats) and the United People's Party Liberal (Kokrajhar).

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DIRECTOR [ADDITIONAL CHARGE]

INBRIEF

ASI starts survey of disputed Bhojshala complex in M.P.

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) on Friday conducted a survey of the controversial Bhojshala/Kamal Maula Mosque complex situated in Dhar district of Madhya Pradesh and made preparations for using carbon-dating equipment, officials said. A 15-member ASI team along with police and district administration officials kept the site ready for scientific assessments following a Madhya Pradesh High Court directive. The court, on March 11, directed the ASI to carry out a "scientific survey" within six weeks of the complex, a medieval-era monument that Hindus believe is a temple while the Muslims call it Kamal Maula Mosque. PTI

BJD leader Damodar Rout passes away in Odisha

Damodar Rout, a stalwart of the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and a seven-time MLA, passed away on Friday following prolonged kidney ailments. He was 83 years old. Survived by a son and two daughters, Rout had been actively involved in politics since 1974, showcasing unwavering loyalty to the former Odisha Chief Minister Biju Patnaik and consistently participating in anti-Congress politics. Throughout his political career, Rout served in various capacities, including the Panchayati Raj department, health, and agriculture, demonstrating profound expertise in the intricacies of the Panchayati Raj system. Known as a vocal leader, he never shied away from expressing his opinions, even when his contemporaries opted for silence to avoid repercussions from party leadership.

HC says Uttar Pradesh Madrasa Education Act 'unconstitutional'

State government has no power to create a board for religious education and students must be accommodated in regular schools, says Bench

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

Students engaged in study inside a madrasa. FILE PHOTO

Terming the Uttar Pradesh Madrasa Education Act, 2004 "unconstitutional", the Allahabad High Court on Friday said the Act violates principles of secularism.

The court maintained that the State has no power to create a board for religious education or to establish a board for school education only for a particular religion and philosophy associated with it.

A Bench of Justices Vivek Chaudhary and Subhash Vidyarthi – while dealing with a writ petition filed by Anshuman Singh Rathore which had challenged the legality of the Uttar Pradesh Madrasa Board on the ground that the same violated the principle of secularism and Articles 14, 15 and 21-A of the Constitution – said it was the duty of the State to provide education, which is secular in nature, more particularly for minors, i.e., children up to the age of 18. "...it is the duty of the state to provide education which is secular in nature. It cannot discriminate and provide different types of education to children belonging to different religions. Any such action on the part of state would be violative of secularism, which is part of the basic structure of the Constitution. Such an action on the part of the state is not only unconstitutional but also highly divisive of the society on religious lines," the court noted.

'No equivalence'

It added that the State cannot hide behind the lame excuse that it is fulfilling its duty by providing traditional education on nominal fee.

"The Supreme Court has repeatedly emphasised on modern education with modern subjects, an education that is universal in nature that prepares a child to make his future bright and to take this country forward. It does not prescribe, by any stretch of imagination, limited education with emphasis only upon a particular religion," the court said.

On the submissions of the State about the substantial presence of madrasas in Uttar Pradesh, the court directed the government to take steps forthwith for accommodating these students in regular schools recognised under the Primary Education Board and schools recognised under the High School and Intermediate Education Board of Uttar Pradesh.

Delhi HC admits CBI appeal challenging acquittals in 2G case

Soibam Rocky Singh
NEW DELHI

A. Raja

The Delhi High Court on Friday said the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had successfully put forth a case for "re-appreciation of the entire evidence" in the 2G spectrum allocation case in which former Telecom Minister A. Raja, and others were acquitted in 2017.

Justice Dinesh Kumar Sharma said: "On the basis of material on record, and after going through the sworn testimonies, material on record, impugned judgment and the submissions made at Bar by both the parties...there is a *prima facie* case which requires deeper examination and re-appreciation/re-appraisal of entire evidence."

The judge said during the hearing that he had noticed "some contradictions in the [2018] judgment itself, which require deeper examination".

"The court at this stage is required to have a *prima facie* helicopter view. There may be a possibility that such contradictions are explained by the defence during the hearing," the judge added.

The verdict came five years after the CBI approached the High Court challenging the trial court verdict acquitting the accused in the 2G case.

The High Court had reserved its decision on March 14. The case was currently at the stage of 'leave to appeal', which is a formal permission granted by a court to a party to challenge a decision in a higher court.

In December 2017, a Special CBI court here had acquitted Mr. Raja, DMK MP K. Kanimozhi and others in the CBI and Enforcement Directorate (ED) cases relating to the 2G case, noting that the prosecution had "miserably failed" to prove the charges.

The Special CBI court also acquitted 17 others, including late DMK supremo M. Karunanidhi's wife Dayalu Ammal, Vinod Goenka, Asif Balwa, film producer Karim Morani, P. Amirtham and Sharad Kumar, director of Kalaignar TV, in the case.

On March 19, 2018, the ED approached the High Court challenging the special court's order acquitting all the accused.

20 CBSE schools across India lose affiliation

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has cancelled the affiliation of 20 schools across the country on Friday, after it was revealed that these schools were involved in malpractices. The malpractices included presenting dummy students, ineligible candidates and not maintaining records properly, said CBSE Secretary Himanshu Gupta.

"Pursuant to a surprise inspection conducted in CBSE schools across the country to check whether the schools are running as per provisions and norms contained in affiliation and examination by-laws, it was found that some schools are committing various malpractices," Mr. Gupta said.

He added: "After thorough inquiry, it has been decided to disaffiliate and downgrade the schools."

These include five schools in Delhi - Sidhhartha Public School, Bharat Mata Saraswati Pal Mandir, National Public School, Chand Ram Public Sr. Sec. School and Marigold Public School.

"Parents and guardians are advised to visit the SARAS portal of the CBSE to check the affiliation status of a school," Mr. Gupta added.

Mariam Mammen Mathew to chair DNPA

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Mariam Mammen Mathew, Chief Executive Officer, Manorama Online, has been appointed chairperson of Digital News Publishers Association (DNPA) for two years from April 1. She would succeed Tanmay Maheshwari, Managing Director, Amar Ujala.

A press release said Ms. Mathew served as vice-chairperson during Mr. Maheshwari's chairmanship. Ms. Mathew said she would aim to amplify the scale, influence and durability of digital news media entities.

Puneet Gupt, Chief Operating Officer, Times Internet, is the new vice-chairman.

Rights groups seek return of land taken away in Sandeshkhali

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

A collective of four civil rights organisations on Friday released a fact-finding report on the recent Sandeshkhali violence and sought for the lands that were forcibly taken from the villagers to be returned and made cultivable at the expense of the State government.

Sandeshkhali, a block in Sundarbans and under the administrative control of North 24 Parganas district, was on the boil over the past several weeks over allegations of sexual assault.

"In the last three years, the frequency of transformation of illegally encroached lands into poultry farms and *bheri* has increased manyfold. The money was given for the first year but the villagers whose lands were illegally taken, did not get the land lease money for the next two years. When they came to ask for payment of the due money, they were beaten," the publication said.

The report which was released at Press Club, Kolkata was compiled by Ganontrik Odhikar Raksha Samiti (APDR), Shramjeevi Mahila Samiti, Amra Ek Sachetan Prayas and Paschim Banga Khet Majoor Samity on the basis of field research conducted and information gathered in the villages of Sandeshkhali block on February 24 and March 8.

The study said land records have been altered illegally on a large scale.

Bridge under construction collapses in Bihar; one dead

Amit Bhelari
PATNA

Blow to connectivity: People view the collapsed portion of the bridge being built over Kosi river in Supaul, Bihar on Friday. PTI

A portion of an under-construction bridge, being built over Kosi river, collapsed in Supaul district of Bihar on Friday morning that left one person dead and nine others injured.

The 10.2-km bridge across the river is being constructed between Bheja and Bakaur in Madhubani and Supaul districts of Bihar. The bridge comprises 170 spans and the length of each span is about 60 metres.

"Today, an unfortunate incident has happened wherein an under-construction span (Pier No. 153-154) has collapsed. As per available report, a total of 10 labourers were trapped in the incident and all of them were rescued. Unfortunately, one person died on the way to the hospital and the other nine are out of danger with minor injuries. Adequate compensation for the deceased as well as injured victims is being arranged," said Supaul District Magistrate Kaushal Kumar.

He said: "Three eminent bridge experts A.K. Srivastava, ex-ADG MORTH (Ministry of Road Transport and Highways) Mahesh Tandon and G.L. Verma, have reached the site to assess the reason behind the accident and take necessary remedial measures."

The original cost of the bridge was ₹1,200 crore, but it has now escalated to ₹1,700 crore. The foundation stone of the bridge, coming under the Bharatmala Project, was laid by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar in 2014.

Assam pauses land sale between people of different religions

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

No objection certificates will not be issued for three months to 'prevent communal conflict'

The Assam government has restricted the grant of no objection certificates (NOCs) for the sale of land between people belonging to different religions for three months.

A March 7 notification issued by the Revenue and Disaster Management (Registration) Department through the Governor said the grant of NOCs has been "kept in abeyance" to prevent vested interests from creating communal conflict during the Lok Sabha election. "...the Governor of Assam is pleased to direct that all cases for grant of NOC for sale of land under Section 21A of Registration Act 1908 where buyer and seller belong to different religion shall be kept in abeyance for a period of 3 months," the notification signed by Gyanendra Dev Tripathi, the Principal Secretary to the Revenue Department said.

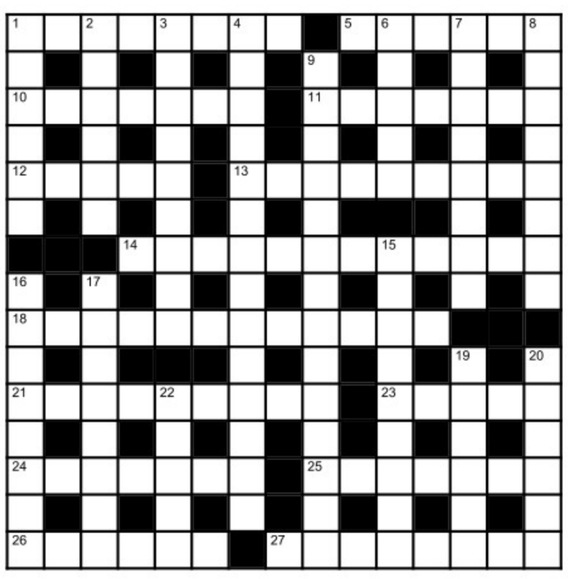
"However, if District Commissioner is of the view that grant of such NOC is absolutely necessary for attending circumstances and will not lead to any breach of law and order, the same may be issued with prior concurrence of Inspector-General of Registration, Assam," the notification added.

TH CROSSWORD + 14130

(set by Dr. X)

To solve this puzzle online, get across to our crossword site. @ *https://qrgo.page.link/jjpTn*

SCAN TO PLAY



Across

1 Naughty cover featuring face of raunchy American writer (8)
5 Brave rogue stealing diamonds slyly perhaps (6)
10 Compound in cacti producing a photochemical effect (7)
11 The whole orchestra is ready to tour India, playing retro (7)
12 Slide in small pool (5)
13 Unmixed alcohol at dinner intoxicated many (4,5)
14 Cutting the cheese in fancy wine bar, cuddling star on date (8,4)
18 Discussion of criminal report involving a model (12)
21 It sweetens temper after a fight (9)
23 Retreats in a jiffy, coming back to protect king (5)
24 Good taste of chillies in beef stew (7)
25 Sexless marriage finally after long immature scrap (7)
26 Steed leaping over line is first (6)
27 Sees one bringing back joint after consuming liquor (8)

Down

1 Noisy dance bars, extremely sleazy (6)
2 Distinctive film director's arrogance - fires top hero (6)
3 Emperor's skull perhaps broken by a prince with craftiness (9)
4 Investigation of mysterious case with arsenic on bottom of spoon (14)
6 Stupefied in rave, ran topless (5)
7 Reclusive patient at centre, overwhelmed by simple back spasm (8)
8 Obstruct criminal starting to escape outside bar (8)
9 Wide-hipped woman under the spotlight (5,2,3,4)
15 Settling with bit of grass after alcohol-drinking session (9)
16 Start to snort cocaine and babble in confusion (8)
17 Sealed one end up easily (8)
19 Going over new housing rule (6)
20 Check out sunglasses, stylish shades (6)
22 Fractures foot in rising commotion (5)

SUDOKU

		6			3		1	5
	5	2			6		7	
3			5					
	1		9		5		3	6
		5				8		
4	3		7		8		2	
					7			2
	7		6			4	8	
9	2		3			6		

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

Solution to previous puzzle

	Y	A	N	K	O	N	E	S	C	H	A	I	N	
		C		I		I	T		I		N			
T	A	C	I	T		C	R	A	C	K	S	H	O	T
I		O		S		A		L		E		A		I
S	T	R	U	C	K	D	O	W	N		A	B	E	D
S		D		H				A		S		I		D
U	P	S	W	I	N	G		R	E	C	I	T	A	L
E				E		O		T		U				Y
P	E	R	U	S	E	D		S	A	L	C	H	O	W
A		A		T		F				P		E		I
P	I	T	H		C	A	U	G	H	T	U	P	I	N
E		A		H		T		E		U		A		K
R	I	F	L	E	S	H	O	T		R	O	R	O	S
		I		A		E		A		A		I		
	S	A	B	R	E	R	A	T	T	L	I	N	G	

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

1	4	6	5	3	7	2	9	8
5	2	3	8	1	9	4	6	7
7	9	8	4	2	6	1	5	3
6	5	2	3	9	1	8	7	4
8	7	9	6	4	2	3	1	5
3	1	4	7	8	5	9	2	6
9	3	5	1	7	4	6	8	2
4	6	1	2	5	8	7	3	9
2	8	7	9	6	3	5	4	1

FAITH

Life after Saranagathi

In His manifestation as Varaha (wild boar), the Lord says (*Aham Smarami Mat Bhaktham*) that even if a person forgets Him, He will not forget the person who surrendered at His feet. As Sri Rama, the Lord proclaims, He would extend asylum to all those who surrendered (*Sakrudeva prapannaya*). Lord Krishna says in Sri Bhagavad Gita, "Completely relinquishing all dharmas, seek me alone for refuge. I will release you from all sins. Grieve not" (*Sarvadharman Parithyajya* – Chapter XVIII sloka 66).

Navalpakkam Sri Vasudevachariar said in a discourse that people who undertake surrender (*Saranagathi*) will be like newlywed couple who feel the change in life and are happy. Saranagathi is a once-in-a-lifetime procedure and can be done at any time, whether young or old.

Saint Ramanuja says this physical body is perishable and that we need not bother about it. The Acharya further advises not to worry about the soul, as it is surrendered and it is His responsibility. Sri Vedantha Desika says in "Adaikalaipathu" that like an arrow released that will not return, we should show our arrow-like devotion towards God and reach Him (*Thirumagalum Thiruvadivum*).

"*Pranavo Dhanu: Saro hi Atma Brahma Thallakshyam uchyathe*" – the Pranava is the bow, our soul is the arrow, and God's divine feet are the object to be achieved.

INBRIEF

DGCA slaps ₹80 lakh fine on AI for 'overworking' pilots

Aviation safety regulator, Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), has imposed a penalty of ₹80 lakh on Air India for 'overworking' pilots in violation of laid-down mandatory duty hours for the crew. The DGCA conducted a spot audit in January and upon random scrutiny, found lapses in providing adequate weekly rest of 36 hours for the cockpit crew, and adequate rest before and after ultra-long range flights such as those to the U.S., it said in a statement.

TMT bar firm Viki to expand via franchises: CEO Reddy

Viki Industries, which makes isteel TMT bars, is adopting a three-pronged strategy to raise its turnover by almost threefold to ₹2,000 crore by FY27 through expansion, entry into new markets via franchisees and introduction of value-added products, CEO G. Gautam Reddy said. "Given the increase in demand for building materials, we have decided to raise the annual output of TMT bars at our Gummidipoondi plant from 1.85 lakh to 2.50 lakh by end-2024," he added.

DRL to market Pharmazz's hypovolemic shock drug

Dr. Reddy's Laboratories (DRL) signed a licensing agreement to market in India U.S. biopharmaceutical firm Pharmazz's Centhaquine, a 'first-of-its-kind' resuscitative agent to treat hypovolemic shock. The product will be distributed by DRL under its Lyfaquin brand. Pharmazz will be entitled to upfront payments and royalties, DRL said. India is the first global territory in which Centhaquine is being introduced immediately, the firm added.

Real GDP growth may hit 8% this fiscal year, signals FinMin

Ministry reckons continuing momentum in Q4 may lift FY24 growth pace above NSO's 7.6% estimate; flags risks next year from 'hardening oil prices'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

India's economy may well end up growing by about 8% this fiscal, outstripping the 7.6% real GDP growth projected by the National Statistical Office (NSO), the Finance Ministry signalled on Friday, citing the continuing momentum in economic activity in the ongoing final quarter of 2023-24.

Citing recent growth projections of 7.8-8% for FY24 from certain agencies, the Ministry said this inclination stemmed from the NSO's growth estimate, which implied a 5.9% pace in Q4. This "is likely to be an understatement given the continuing momentum of the economy".

Despite risks such as "hardening crude oil prices" and "global supply chain bottlenecks to trade", the Ministry asserted the outlook for 2024-25 was bright with this fiscal closing on a positive note of 'strong growth, stable inflation and external account and a progressive employment outlook'.

It noted that retail inflation had extended its stay inside the RBI's tolerance range of 2%-6% for a sixth month with core inflation continuing to ease.

"Despite price volatility in certain specific food items, headline inflation stayed below 6% throughout this year except in July and August," the Ministry said in its monthly review, adding that spices and cereals had recorded the lowest inflation since August 2022 last month. For the coming months, the inflation outlook was positive, it said, citing the pick-up in the sowing of summer crops, which was likely to help reduce food prices.

Arguing that robust investment activity was "clearly underway", the Ministry said that private consumption demand was strengthening as seen in indicators like "burgeoning air passenger traffic and sale of passenger vehicles, digital payments, improved consumer confidence and expectations of a normal monsoon". The Ministry, however, seemed to acknowledge that private consumption demand was backed by 'resilient urban demand' while rural demand remained weak.

'Rural demand'

"The recovery in rural consumption demand is expected to be strengthened by the forecast of a normal monsoon," it said. It also underlined that an increase in household savings would be necessary to finance private sector capital formation.

"On the external front, the narrowing merchandise trade deficit and the rising net services receipts are expected to result in an improvement in the current account balance in 2023-24. However, in 2024-25, the current account deficit will bear watching," it averred, hinting at the risks to goods exports and possible oil price surges due to the Red Sea crisis and the drought in the Panama Canal.

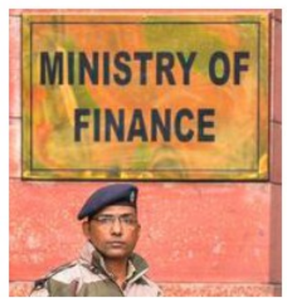
Outlook 'bright'

FinMin cites positive close to FY24 with 'strong growth, stable inflation, external account' as factors for upbeat FY25 outlook

- Sees inflation view positive as pick-up in summer crops' sowing likely to help pare food prices
- Expects rural demand recovery to strengthen on 'forecast of a normal monsoon'
- Flags risk to goods exports outlook from Red Sea crisis, need to monitor current account deficit in FY25

'Inequality dipped over the past decade'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



Without directly wading into the debate over the rise in income and wealth inequality, the Finance Ministry asserted that India experienced "inclusive growth" over the past decade, citing "reassuring findings" of the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey of 2022-23.

"The rural-urban divide in MPCE [monthly per capita consumption expenditure] has declined considerably," the Ministry said. "Within rural and urban areas, the consumption of the lowest 5% of the MPCE population grew at a faster rate than the top 5%, pointing to a decline in inequality over the last decade."

Juxtaposing the MPCE numbers with per capita gross national income, reveal an inclusive trend in economic growth, it held. "The MPCE/PCI ratio has increased for all consumption classes except the top 5% in rural India and the top 10% in urban India."

India now eyes Africa for critical minerals

Lithium blocks in Kashmir will be auctioned again as govt. received only 2 bids in round one

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

India is looking at Africa for minerals, including cobalt, and other critical minerals, Mines Secretary V. L. Kantha Rao said on Friday. The country is still engaging with Australia for lithium blocks, he added.

Mr. Rao said, "We are looking at Zambia, Namibia, Congo, Ghana and Mozambique for minerals."

Critical minerals, including lithium are crucial for electric vehicle batteries and for India's decarbonisation mission.

Mr. Rao also said auction rules for offshore mineral blocks were being readied and that 10 blocks would be up for sale after the general elections. He added that the result of the first round of auction would be out in 10 days.

Mr. Rao said the lithium blocks in Jammu and Kashmir would now be auctioned in the third tranche as it received only two bids in the first round.

Seven critical mineral blocks have been put up for sale in the third round.

MARKETS

MARKET WATCH

	FRIDAY	% CHANGE
Sensex	72,832	0.26
US Dollar	83.61	-0.58
Gold	66,575	-1.30
Brent oil	85.55	0.12

NIFTY 50

	PRICE	CHANGE
Adani Enter	3107.70	41.20
Adani Ports	1281.60	19.15
Apollo Hosp	6375.90	193.40
Asian Paints	2841.50	20.35
Axis Bank	1033.30	-2.30
Bajaj Auto	8945.25	194.65
Bajaj Finserv	1587.55	-15.05
Bajaj Finance	6760.90	45.15
Bharti Airtel	1236.10	15.30
BPCL	592.80	5.00
Britannia Ind	4865.00	58.30
Cipla	1481.25	32.55
Coal India	431.95	-0.10
Divis Lab	3431.45	-33.85
Dr Reddys Lab	6203.20	75.00
Eicher Motors	3988.40	69.45
Grasim Ind	2223.55	18.00
HCL Tech	1557.85	-37.95
HDFC Bank	1442.85	-2.90
HDFC Life	623.85	1.60
Hero MotoCorp	4684.00	164.10
Hindalco	547.75	8.05
Hind Unilever	2256.55	14.20
ICICI Bank	1090.30	8.50
IndusInd Bank	1512.10	28.00
Infosys	1508.85	-45.85
ITC	428.60	7.35
JSW Steel	824.80	12.45
Kotak Bank	1776.40	4.25
L&T	3617.80	57.80
LTIMindtree Ltd.	5005.00	-154.90
M&M	1878.80	12.95
Maruti Suzuki	12337.70	429.55
NestleIndia	2573.40	19.75
NTPC	324.75	-0.25
ONGC	263.25	0.30
PowerGrid Corp	275.75	2.00
Reliance Ind	2910.05	8.10
SBI Life	1501.10	33.05
State Bank	746.70	2.40
Sun Pharma	1608.90	43.70
TataConsumerProduct	1122.75	-11.20
Tata Motors	979.80	14.90
Tata Steel	151.80	1.70
TCS	3910.90	-62.05
Tech Mahindra	1262.65	-20.10
Titan	3706.70	79.15
UltraTech Cement	9681.75	81.00
UPL	470.00	14.45
Wipro	487.10	-13.35

EXCHANGE RATES

Indicative direct rates in rupees a unit except yen at 4 p.m. on March 22

CURRENCY	TT BUY	TT SELL
US Dollar	83.23	83.55
Euro	90.04	90.39
British Pound	104.71	105.11
Japanese Yen (100)	54.91	55.12
Chinese Yuan	11.51	11.56
Swiss Franc	92.44	92.80
Singapore Dollar	61.70	61.94
Canadian Dollar	61.29	61.55
Malaysian Ringitt	17.56	17.65
Australian Dollar	54.23	54.44

Source:Indian Bank

Cotton production estimates diverge

M. Soundariya Preetha
COIMBATORE

The Committee on Cotton Production and Consumption (COCPC) has estimated cotton output for this season, ending September, at 323 lakh bales and exports at 27 lakh bales.

The Cotton Association of India (CAI), however, put production at 309 lakh bales as it expects output in Telangana to be 34 lakh bales against 48 lakh bales estimated by the COCPC.

"We get the cotton-pressing data from the Telangana ginners association," said CAI President Atul Ganatra. "Telangana's production this year is higher than the last season. But, it is not as high as estimated by COCPC."

S. K. Sundararaman, chairman of the Southern India Mills Association, advised the textile mills to avoid panic buying based on various estimates. Cotton price rose to ₹61,500 a candy of 355 kg last month from ₹55,300 a candy though the supply position is comfortable. The Cotton Corporation of India is prioritising supply to textile mills, especially the smaller units, he added.

Govt. rejects HZL's plan to split firm: Rao

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Mines Ministry has rejected a proposal by Vedanta group firm Hindustan Zinc Ltd. (HZL) to split the company into different entities, a top official said.

The government is the largest minority shareholder in HZL, owning 29.54% stake in the firm.

"We have not agreed to the proposal," Mines Secretary V. L. Kantha Rao told reporters on the sidelines of a function here.

Hindustan Zinc had earlier announced plans of spinning off business into separate entities, including zinc and silver, to increase its market capitalisation.

Asked about the reason for the rejection of the proposal, Mr. Rao said, "Whatever report we have in front of us, we are not convinced as a shareholder."

HZL earlier said it had engaged a leading advisory firm to study its plans of spinning off the business.

The firm had also said the company's board had decided to undertake a 'comprehensive review of its corporate structure for unlocking potential value.'

'Sloganeering does not change the world'

Lalatendu Mishra
PUNE

Rajiv Bajaj

Mere slogans do not help usher in change and India can only progress by imparting skills to its youth, Bajaj Auto MD Rajiv Bajaj asserted on Friday.

"You do not change the world by sloganeering. Saying 'Make in India' does not change the world; saying 'Aatmanirbhar'...'vocal for local' does not change the world; and saying 'Viksit Bharat' does not change the world," he observed.

Without naming any individual or organisation he said: "Words would not change the world, unless you have the skills to put those words into action. It would certainly not change the world by saying 'I will spend tens of thousand of crores of rupees on CSR or that I want to touch billions of lives'."

Asking the media to introspect, Mr. Bajaj said: "You have been carrying these slogans. It is time to pause and reflect as to how much of this has turned into reality".

Mr. Bajaj was speaking at a function organised by Bajaj Group companies, which have collectively decided to commit ₹5,000 crore investment over five years to help more than 2 crore young Indians benefit through skilling. The group's charitable trusts will also contribute to the 'Bajaj Beyond' initiative.

Bajaj family members present on the occasion committed to co-creating a thriving and inclusive future for all Indians.

The various skill building programs undertaken by group companies such as mechanical engineering training provided by Bajaj Auto and financial services training imparted by Bajaj Finserv have been brought under one umbrella.

"With Bajaj Beyond, we will expand our skilling efforts across the group. Together, we will design future-proof curriculums, provide real-world, hands-on experiences, and equip our youth with the adaptability and innovation required to thrive in the ever-evolving mobility landscape," Mr Bajaj said.

"Our initiatives have demonstrated the transformative impact of empowering India's youth," said Shekhar Bajaj, CMD, Bajaj Electricals Ltd.

"We are creating a versatile pool of skilled resources that will drive India's growth story," observed Bajaj Auto chairman Niraj Bajaj.

"Skilling has been at the heart of our social impact initiatives and we have seen the positive multiplier effect it has on the well-being of youth and their families," asserted Bajaj Finserv CMD Sanjiv Bajaj.

(The writer was in Pune at the invitation of the Bajaj Group of companies)

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A BG-BGE

HELSINKI

Finland to resume funding to UN Palestinian refugee agency

REUTERS

Finland will resume funding to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees UNRWA, Foreign Trade and Development Minister Ville Tavio said on Friday. Finland suspended its yearly funding of five million euros in January, following Israel's allegations that 12 of the UN agency employees were involved in Oct. 7 Hamas attack. AFP

KAMPALA

Uganda's President Museveni promotes son as military chief

REUTERS

Uganda's veteran leader, Yoweri Museveni, has appointed his son to head the country's defence forces, the nation's government said, capping a dizzying rise for Muhoozi Kainerugaba. The Ministry announcement late on Thursday followed years of speculation that Mr. Kainerugaba was being groomed for the top job. AFP

MALE

Maldives President seeks debt relief from India amid tensions

AP

After his anti-India rhetoric, Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu has struck a reconciliatory tone, saying India will continue to remain his country's "closest ally" and urged New Delhi to provide debt relief to the archipelago nation. The Maldives owed approximately $400.9 million to India by the end of last year. PTI

LONDON

Britain's Kate says she has cancer, and is undergoing chemotherapy

AFP

Kate, the Princess of Wales, said on Friday she has cancer and is undergoing chemotherapy. Her condition was disclosed in a video message recorded on Wednesday and broadcast on Friday. Ms. Kate asked for "time, space and privacy" while she is treated for an unspecified type of cancer, which was found after her surgery. AP

Russia, China veto U.S. bid on Gaza 'ceasefire' at UN Security Council

The draft had stopped short of explicitly demanding that Israel immediately end its campaign in Gaza; Moscow accused Washington of a 'hypocritical spectacle' that does not pressure Israel; Beijing said the draft 'dodged the most central issue'

Agence France-Presse
UNITED NATIONS

Russia and China on Friday vetoed a U.S.-led draft resolution at the Security Council on a ceasefire in Gaza, with Moscow accusing Washington of a "hypocritical spectacle" that does not pressure Israel.

The United States, Israel's main ally which has vetoed previous ceasefire calls, put forward the resolution which for the first time would have supported "the imperative of an immediate and sustained ceasefire" and condemned the October 7 attack by Hamas.

Russia and China exercised their vetoes, Algeria also voted against and Guyana abstained. The other 11 Security Council members voted in favour, including permanent members France and Britain.

China's Ambassador to the UN, Zhang Jun, votes during a UNSC meeting at the United Nations headquarters on Friday. AFP

Russia's Ambassador, Vasily Nebenzia, said that the United States was doing nothing to rein in Israel, mocking Washington for speaking of a ceasefire after "Gaza has been virtually wiped off the face of the Earth".

"The American product is exceedingly politicised, with the sole purpose being to play to voters and throw them a bone in the form of some kind of a mention of a ceasefire in Gaza," he said.

The resolution will "ensure the impunity of Israel, whose crimes are not even assessed in the draft".

The draft had stopped short of explicitly demanding that Israel immediately end its campaign in Gaza. In the delicate language of Security Council resolutions, the draft "determines" the "imperative" of an "immediate and sustained" ceasefire.

The draft linked a ceasefire to ongoing talks, led by Qatar with support from the United States and Egypt, to halt the war in return for Hamas releasing hostages.

China's representative, Zhang Jun, said the draft "dodged the most central issue, that of a ceasefire" through its "ambiguous" language.

"Nor does it even provide an answer to the question of realising a ceasefire in the short term," he said.

Alternative resolution

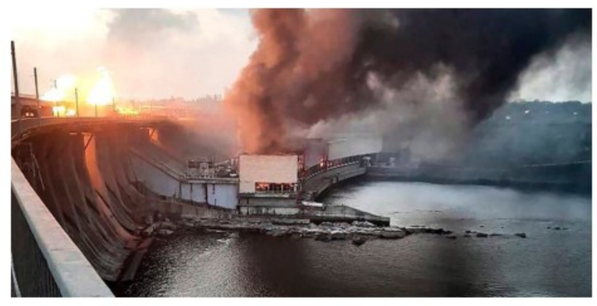
French President Emmanuel Macron, speaking in Brussels immediately after the vetoes, said France would keep pushing an alternative resolution for a ceasefire.

The Security Council may later on Friday consider another resolution with a more explicit call for an immediate ceasefire.

Speaking before the vote on the U.S. draft, Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield said, "By adopting the resolution before us, we can put pressure on Hamas to accept the deal".

Russia admits 'state of war' amid massive strikes on Kyiv

Agence France-Presse
KYIV



Smoke and fire rise over the Dnipro hydroelectric power plant after Russian attacks in Dnipro, Ukraine on Friday. AP

Russia admitted two years into its invasion of Ukraine on Friday that it was "in a state of war," as it launched a massive wave of missile and drone attacks on its neighbour's territory.

Russia fired almost 90 missiles and more than 60 Iranian-designed kamikaze drones, damaging dozens of energy facilities including power stations, in what Ukrainian officials said was an attempt to cripple the country's electricity and heating supply.

Russia said the wave of strikes was retaliation for a series of Ukrainian attacks on its border regions in recent weeks.

At least five people were killed and more than 20 injured, according to Ukraine's Interior Ministry and local officials.

"We are in a state of war," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said in an interview to a pro-Kremlin newspaper, published on Friday.

The admission marks an escalation in official language used to describe the conflict, which the Kremlin initially referred to as a "special military operation".

Loss of power

Meanwhile, Kharkiv mayor said on Friday that a Russian missile attack has "completely" cut off the electricity and heat supply to Ukraine's second largest city.

"The city is completely without power and as a result the water and heating supply are not working," Kharkiv mayor Igor Terekhov said in a video on his social media.

It has targeted Ukraine's energy infrastructure throughout the war, now in its third year, in strikes Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has called "energy terrorism".

Ukraine's state-run power grid, Ukrenergo, said the attack on the energy network was the "largest on record."

Simon Harris set to be Ireland's youngest PM

Agence France-Presse
DUBLIN

Simon Harris, set to become Ireland's youngest ever taoiseach (Prime Minister), will hope his social media skills and fresh face can save his party's flagging fortunes as elections loom.

Already dubbed by media the "TikTok Taoiseach" (pronounced "Tee-shock"), the 37-year-old beats the previous record holder, predecessor Leo Varadkar, who was 38 when he took the top job in 2017.

After Mr. Varadkar's shock resignation on Wednesday, Mr. Harris leapt from the blocks in the race for leader of the centre-right Fine Gael party and by default Prime Minister.

By Thursday lunchtime he had secured endorsements by a majority of party colleagues, prompting rivals to rule themselves out – and effectively ending the leadership contest before it had even begun.

Simon Harris

With no other candidates expected to emerge before nominations close on Monday, pundits described Mr. Harris's apparent uncontested procession to the leadership as a 'coronation'.

"I'm in, I'm ready to step up, and I'm ready to serve," he told the public broadcaster RTE's evening news programme after officially announcing his candidacy.

Harris's inevitable election as taoiseach when the Dail (Irish Parliament) returns from recess on April 9 crowns a meteoric ascent.

Mr. Harris's prominence on social media especially TikTok has made him one of the most visible politicians in Ireland.

With 1.4 million "likes" on TikTok, and hundreds of thousands of followers on both X and Instagram, he posts content almost daily to his audience.

With his youth and slick communication skills his opponents jibe that he is "Leo 2.0".

Chinese coast guard tries to block Filipino vessels in South China Sea

Associated Press
MANILA

Chinese coast guard ships backed by a military helicopter attempted unsuccessfully to block two Philippine government vessels carrying scientists from reaching two sandbars in the disputed South China Sea, Philippine officials said on Friday.

Chinese coast guard personnel blew the horn on one of their ships for half an hour and repeatedly transmitted radio warnings during the confrontation on Thursday, but the Filipino scientists managed to complete their four-hour marine and biodiversity research at the barren sandbars called Sandy Cay, the officials said.

The Chinese coast guard gave a different account of the face-off.

Continued face-off: A Chinese Coast Guard ship manoeuvring past a Philippine vessel in the disputed South China Sea. AFP

A spokesperson, Gan Yu, said in a statement that its law enforcement officers "boarded" the sandbars, which Beijing calls Tiexian Reef, and dealt with what it called "illegal activities" by 34 Philippine personnel who "ignored China's warnings and dissuasion".

It was the latest flare-up in increasingly tense territorial disputes that are seen as a potential Asian flashpoint that might bring China and the United States into a conflict if they degenerate into a major armed confrontation.

China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Taiwan and Brunei have overlapping territorial claims that have erupted from time to time into brief confrontations in the South China Sea.

Worsening hostilities

Hostilities between China and the Philippines, however, have worsened since last year, resulting in minor collisions at sea and injuries to a few Filipino crewmen, sparking a war of words.

Washington has no territorial claims in the strategic waterway but has questioned China's claim to virtually the entire seaway.

The United States has repeatedly warned that it's obligated to defend the Philippines, its oldest treaty ally in Asia, if Filipino forces, ships and aircraft come under an armed attack.

Gunmen fire on crowds at a Moscow concert hall

Associated Press
MOSCOW

Several gunmen burst into a big concert hall in Moscow on Friday and fired automatic weapons at the crowd, injuring an unspecified number of people and starting a massive blaze in an apparent terror attack days after President Vladimir Putin cemented his grip on the country in a highly orchestrated electoral landslide.

The attack took place as crowds gathered for a concert of Picnic, a famed Russian rock band, at the hall that can accommodate over 6,000 people. Russian news reports said that visitors were being evacuated.

It is not yet clear who might be behind the attack.

Australia, Britain to build AUKUS subs

Agence France-Presse
ADELAIDE

Australia and Britain said on Friday that a landmark deal to develop AUKUS nuclear-powered submarines would go ahead, despite mounting fears about costs, capabilities and the possible return of Donald Trump.

Under the fledgling AUKUS deal, the two countries along with the United States have pledged to beef up their military muscle in a bid to counter China's rise.

Defence chiefs this week unveiled ambitious plans to supply Australia with a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines, a key pillar of the agreement.

"The three governments involved here are working at pace to make this happen," Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles said on Friday.

However, some fear Mr. Trump could jettison the pact if he wins this year's presidential election, returning to his "America first" style of foreign policy.

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E-TENDER NOTICE

Online bids are invited from manufacturers/direct importers / loan licensees on behalf of Department of Health, Govt of Kerala for the procurement of Biolarvicide: Bacillus Thuringiensis Israeliensis AS 5% (BTI) for NVBDCP for the year 2023-2024.

Sl. No.	Tender No. and Date	Category
1.	KMSCL/ED/BTI-NVBDCP/RC/2024/003 dtd. 22/03/2024	Insecticide

Last date and time of online uploading of tender - 20.04.2024, 5.00 pm.
Date and time of opening of Technical bid - 22.04.2024 11.00 am.

Tenders shall be downloaded and submitted online through the e-tender portal **www.etenders.kerala.gov.in**.

(Sd/-) MANAGING DIRECTOR (Tender Inviting Authority)

UT OF LAKSHADWEEP
LAKSHADWEEP DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION LIMITED
(A GOVT. OF INDIA UNDERTAKING)
Ph: 04842323448/458
Web: www.ldcl.nic.in
E-mail:amindivi@asianetindia.com

F.No: LDCL/Manning1
Dt: 14.03.2024

TENDER

E-tender is invited for engagement of Manning agent for Passenger Vessel Kavaratti.
For details and E-tendering please visit website **https://www.tenderwizard.com/UTL** and **https://tendersutl.gov.in** Tender due on 03.04.2024 at 02.30 PM. For any help in e-tendering, please contact Help Desk No. 080-40482000 / 9605557738/ 9686115318 **(https://tenderwizard.com/UTL)** and 0120-4001002, 4001005, 6277787 **(https://tendersutl.gov.in).**

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Phone : 05644-222731, e-mail : rj_acebha@nic.in
Corrigendum No. 01, NIT Nos. 108 to 114/2023-24

The following corrigendum is hereby issued for the NIB No. 108 to 114/2023-24 of this office.

Activity	NIT No. 108 to 113/23-24		NIT No. 114/23-24	
	Existing Provision	Amended Provision	Existing Provision	Amended Provision
Availability of tender documents on Web Site	From 27-02-2024 to 20-03-2024 up to 18:00 Hrs	From 27-02-2024 to 08-04-2024 up to 18:00 Hrs	From 27-02-2024 to 01-04-2024 up to 18:00 Hrs	From 27-02-2024 to 08-04-2024 up to 18:00 Hrs
Last Date & time for online submission of Tender	From 27-02-2024 to 20-03-2024 up to 18:00 Hrs	From 27-02-2024 to 08-04-2024 up to 18:00 Hrs	From 27-02-2024 to 01-04-2024 up to 18:00 Hrs	From 27-02-2024 to 08-04-2024 up to 18:00 Hrs
Deposition of affidavits on Non Judicial Stamp Paper (Original)	Up to 10.30 AM on 21-03-2024	Up to 10.30 AM on 09-04-2024	Up to 10.30 AM on 02-04-2024	Up to 10.30 AM on 09-04-2024
Date of opening of Pre-Qualification bid.	21-03-2024 at 11:00 Hrs	09-04-2024 at 11:00 Hrs	02-04-2024 at 11:00 Hrs	09-04-2024 at 11:00 Hrs

All other terms and conditions shall remain same as mentioned in original NIT.
NIB Code : PHE2324A5828
UBN No. : 1. PHE2324WSOB13854 5. PHE2324WSOB13858
2. PHE2324WSOB13855 6. PHE2324WLOB13859
3. PHE2324WSOB13856 7. PHE2324WLOB13860
4. PHE2324WSOB13857

(Ram Niwas Meena)
Addl. Chief Engineer
PHED, Region Bharatpur
DIPR/C/3281

STAR-STUDDED

The 'carnival of cricket' gets an enthralling opening ceremony

B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

It was all joy, jollity, and goodwill as music enthralled and united everyone at the IPL 2024 opening ceremony. It felt surreal when the crowd joined in singing "Vande Mataram," staying true to the theme of the event — Rise as one! After the night was lit up with flashy lights all through the event, a series of fireworks took off!

DIFFERENT CHALLENGES

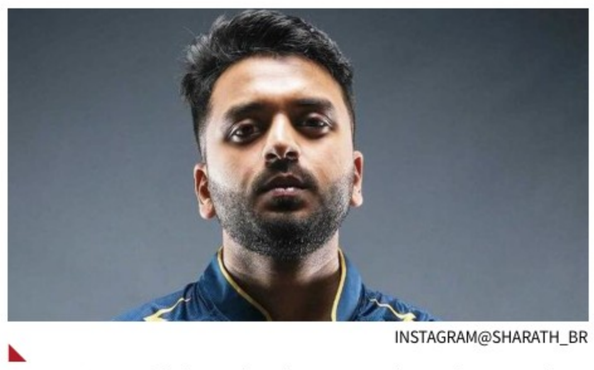
T20 is not taxing on body but travel during League is: Cummins

K.R. DEEPAK

Pat Cummins said T20 is not taxing on body but the travel involved in the two-month long IPL and different-style preparations to face a variety of teams is certainly a huge challenge. "I'm used to playing a lot of Test cricket, so four overs isn't as taxing on your body. But it can be mentally taxing to travel," he said.

FRESH FACE

Gujarat Titans ropes in Sharath in place of injured Minz



INSTAGRAM@SHARATH_BR

Gujarat Titans added B.R. Sharath to its squad as replacement for the injured Robin Minz for the Indian Premier League 2024 season. The Karnataka wicketkeeper-batter will join GT for his base price of ₹20 Lakh. He has so far played 28 T20s, in addition to 20 First Class matches and 43 List A games, and has 328 T20 runs to his name.

GETTING THE NOD

Rajasthan Royals signs Kotian in place of Zampa

EMMANUAL YOGINI

Rajasthan Royals on Friday announced the signing of Indian all-rounder Tanush Kotian as a replacement for Adam Zampa, who has pulled out of the upcoming season of the Indian Premier League due to personal reasons. The 25-year-old recently picked up 29 wickets and amassed 502 runs in 10 matches in the Ranji Trophy.

Mustafizur and batters fashion CSK's winning start

The yellow brigade's left-arm pacer scalps four wickets in his first two overs to derail the Royal Challengers innings before Rawat and Karthik lift the side to 173 which proves inadequate

IPL-17

S. Dipak Ragav
CHENNAI

Ruturaj Gaikwad couldn't have asked for a better start as captain of Chennai Super Kings as his side began its title defence in style with a comfortable six-wicket win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the opening game of IPL-17 at MAC Stadium on Friday.

Chasing 174, CSK powered through to the target, riding on a series of cameos from its batters. Opener Rachin Ravindra set the ball rolling by blasting a quickfire 37 (15b, 3x4, 3x6) before Ajinkya Rahane, Daryl Mitchell, Shivam Dube, and Ravindra Jadeja chipped in with valuable contributions.

Aggressive approach

Though no batter made a half-century, the team's aggressive approach of looking for boundaries paid off.

Ravindra got Super Kings off to a flyer, smashing the pacers all over the park with some clean hitting. Rahane and Mitchell then kept the tempo up, hitting two sixes each before Cameron Green accounted for the duo in his successive overs to give RCB a sniff of a chance.

But Dube (34 n.o., 28b, 4x4, 1x6) and Jadeja (25 n.o., 17b, 1x6) ensured the Men in Yellow stepped into the post-Dhoni captaincy era on the right note stitching an unbroken 66-run stand for the fifth wicket to take their side to victory.

Earlier in the evening, Mustafizur Rahman (four for 29) set it up for the home team with a crafty spell in his first game for CSK.

Mustafizur broke the back of Royal Challengers Bengaluru's batting to have the visitors in deep trouble at 78 for five. Electing to bat, skipper Faf du Plessis (35, 23b, 8x4) got his side off to a strong start.

But in the fifth over, Mustafizur pulled things back with a twin strike, removing du Plessis caught at deep-point before having Rajat Patidar caught behind.

The left-arm pacer struck twice again to dismiss Virat Kohli and Cameron Green in the space of two balls. A late flourish from Anuj Rawat (48, 25b, 4x6, 3x6) and Dinesh Karthik (38 n.o., 3x4, 2x6) allowed RCB to post a fighting total of 173 for six.

However, it was not enough against the defending champion's batting firepower.

Next assignment

RCB: March 25 vs. **PBKS**
Bengaluru, 7.30 p.m.

CSK: March 26 vs. **GT**
Chennai, 7.30 p.m.

Fizz and blitz: Mustafizur ripped through the top-order and Ravindra's quickfire innings set the ball rolling for Super Kings' successful chase. M. VEDHAN

SCOREBOARD

ROYAL CHALLENGERS

Virat Kohli c Ravindra b Mustafizur 21 *(20b, 1x6)*, Faf du Plessis c Ravindra b Mustafizur 35 *(23b, 8x4)*, Rajat Patidar c Dhoni b Mustafizur 0 *(3b)*, Glenn Maxwell c Dhoni b Chahar 0 *(1b)*, Cameron Green b Mustafizur 18 *(22b, 1x4)*, Anuj Rawat run out 48 *(25b, 4x4, 3x6)*, Dinesh Karthik (not out) 38 *(26b, 3x4, 2x6)*; Extras (b-1, lb-2, w-10): 13; Total (for six wkts. in 20 overs): 173.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-41 (du Plessis, 4.3), 2-41 (Patidar, 4.6), 3-42 (Maxwell, 5.3), 4-77 (Kohli, 11.2), 5-78 (Green, 11.4), 6-173 (Rawat, 19.6).

SUPER KINGS BOWLING

Chahar 4-0-37-1, Deshpande 4-0-47-0, Theekshana 4-0-36-0, Mustafizur 4-0-29-4, Jadeja 4-0-21-0.

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS

Ruturaj Gaikwad c Green b Dayal 15 *(15b, 3x4)*, Rachin Ravindra c Patidar b Karn 37 *(15b, 3x4, 3x6)*, Ajinkya Rahane c Maxwell b Green 27 *(19b, 2x6)*, Daryl Mitchell c Patidar b Green 22 *(18b, 2x6)*, Shivam Dube **(Impact Player in place of Mustafizur)** (not out) 34 *(28b, 4x4, 1x6)*, Ravindra Jadeja (not out) 25 *(17b, 1x6)*; Extras (b-4, lb-4, w-8): 16; Total (for four wkts. in 18.4 overs): 176.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-38 (Ruturaj, 3.6 overs), 2-71 (Ravindra, 6.6), 3-99 (Rahane, 10.2), 4-110 (Mitchell, 12.3)

RCB BOWLING

Siraj 4-0-38-0, Dayal **(Impact Player in place of Karthik)** 3-0-28-1, Joseph 3.4-0-38-0, Karn 2-0-24-1, Dagar 2-0-6-0, Green 3-0-27-2, Maxwell 1-0-7-0.

Toss: RCB; **PoM:** Mustafizur.

CSK won by six wickets with eight balls to spare.

Shreyas and Gambhir's return should be a catalyst for the Knight Riders

Y.B. Sarangi
KOLKATA

The return of two fine leaders, skipper Shreyas Iyer and mentor Gautam Gambhir, and the incentive of beginning its campaign at home after four editions should motivate Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) to give its best against Sunrisers Hyderabad (SRH) in the Indian Premier League at the Eden Gardens on Saturday.

The side's expensive purchase, left-armer Mitchell Starc, will lead the pace department and play a crucial role in PowerPlay and death overs.

While the trusted spin duo of Sunil Narine and Varun Chakravarthy may get priority, KKR will weigh other options.

The batting looks stronger with Shreyas' return even though there are apprehensions over his fitness.

Venkatesh Iyer, Nitish Rana, Rinku Singh, Manish Pandey and Caribbeans Andre Russell and his back-up Sherfane Rutherford bolster it. Keeper-batters Phil Salt, Rahmanullah Gurbaz and K.S. Bharat widen KKR's range of choice.

> I feel I'm in the best shape possible. I've been doing my training regularly, hitting the balls and batting for longer periods of time
>
> **SHREYAS IYER,** KKR captain

Leading a T20 side for the first time, Australian captain Pat Cummins, in SRH colours, will try to prove himself against his old side. He will have the company of known pacers including Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Marco Jansen, Jaydev Unadkat, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Umran Malik and T. Natarajan.

In spin, SRH may have to rely on Washington Sundar, Mayank Markande and Shahbaz Ahmed in the absence of Wanindu Hasaranga.

Aiden Markram, Travis Head, Heinrich Klassen, Glenn Phillips, Rahul Tripathi, Mayank Agarwal, Abdul Samad and Anmolpreet Singh inspire confidence in batting.

The pitch, which remained covered during rains earlier this week, will be a thing to decode for both sides.

Vital cog: Head's contribution would be crucial to Sunrisers' fortunes. K.R. DEEPAK

Today's matches

PBKS vs. DC	Mullanpur, 3.30 p.m.	KKR vs. SRH
HEAD-TO-HEAD		HEAD-TO-HEAD
PLAYED: 32		PLAYED: 25
PBKS 16 | DC 16		KKR 16 | SRH 9
PREVIOUS MEETING: DC won by 15 runs, 2023		PREVIOUS MEETING: KKR won by five runs, 2023

LIVE ON STAR SPORTS 1 (SD & HD) & JIO CINEMA

Punjab Kings' varied attack can spoil Pant's Capitals comeback

M.R. Praveen Chandran
MULLANPUR

It is hard to force a smile from Ricky Ponting, known for his grizzly temperament during his playing days. But the former Australian skipper and Delhi Capitals' coach did break into a big smile while talking about the return of Rishabh Pant to the side for the IPL opener against Punjab Kings at the Maharaja Yadavindra Singh Stadium here on Saturday.

Relieved man

Ponting appears to be a relieved man as the talismanic Pant takes over the reins of captaincy and makes a comeback to revive the fortunes of the side that underperformed in his absence.

As he plays his first competitive match after surviving a life-threatening accident in December 2022, Pant admitted at the press conference that he will be feeling nervous, jittery and excited.

As much as the narrative is centred around Pant's comeback and his team's batting strength, the weakness around Delhi's bowling cannot be ignored.

With Lungi Ngidi ruled out, Jhye Richardson nursing an injury and Anrich Nortje coming back after a long injury layoff, Delhi's fast bowling options hardly inspire confidence and could be exploited by its rival.

Playing at the new home ground and in a vibrant new jersey, Punjab Kings will be determined to wipe away the smiles from the Delhi camp.

The Mullanpur track has favoured the batters going by the scores in the recent First Class matches played on it.

With its array of dazzling power-hitters, PBKS will certainly relish the surface.

But, it could be Punjab's varied bowling attack that could make a difference in the contest between two sides loaded with strokemakers.

Story of the day: All eyes will be on how DC's talismanic captain Pant returns to competitive cricket. R.V. MOORTHY

> He [Pant] will be nervous playing his first game for a while. I've always said that being nervous is always good
>
> **PONTING**

> The cricket family will be happy to see him [Pant] back after a long break
>
> **LIVINGSTONE**

INBRIEF

Dhananjaya and Kamindu score centuries

Dhananjaya de Silva and Kamindu Mendis both hit centuries to help Sri Lanka post 280 in its first innings before its seamers rattled Bangladesh on the opening day of the first Test in Sylhet on Friday. Bangladesh finished the day at 32 for three as Vishwa Fernando and Kasun Rajitha struck early in the innings for the visitors.

The scores: Sri Lanka 280 (Dhananjaya de Silva 102, Kamindu Mendis 102, Khaled Ahmed 3/72, Nahid Rana 3/87) vs Bangladesh 32/3. **Toss:** Bangladesh.

Diya and Harithashree duo triumphs

Diya Ramesh and Harithashree Venkatesh beat Polina Nikitina and Viktoria Sedenkova 7-5, 6-3 in the girls doubles final of the Indian Tree ITF junior tennis tournament at the Shanti Academy on Friday. The boys doubles final was won by Dev Kanbargimath and Aarjun Pandit.

Doubles results (finals): Boys: Dev Kanbargimath (Rou) & Aarjun Pandit bt Kether Gonzalez & Oswaldo Tirado (Mex) 7-6(5), 6-3. **Girls:** Diya Ramesh & Harithashree Venkatesh bt Polina Nikitina & Viktoria Sedenkova 7-5, 6-3.

Vettel back with Porsche to test a Le Mans car

Four-time Formula 1 champion Sebastian Vettel is getting back behind the wheel. Vettel is joining Porsche as a test driver on its Le Mans program and says "we will then see what happens next." The German will drive the Porsche 963 car for works team Porsche Penske Motorsport as part of a 36-hour test session at the Motorland Aragon circuit in Spain next week, the German manufacturer said on Friday.

Malaysia says no to hosting 2026 Commonwealth Games

Malaysia on Friday decided against hosting the 2026 Commonwealth Games because of the cost, the government said, in a fresh blow to an event seen as outdated by some. The decision, made at a cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, follows the withdrawal of the Australian state of Victoria last year.

Anirudh and Vijay lose in doubles quarterfinals

Fourth seeds Anirudh Chandrasekar and Vijay Sundar Prashanth were beaten by Luca Margaroli and Santiago Taverna 6-3, 7-5 in the doubles quarterfinals of the €74,825 Challenger tennis tournament in Murcia, Spain.

Neergaard-Petersen in the van

Rasmus Neergaard-Petersen's bogey-free seven-under 65 helped him enjoy a two-stroke lead after the second round of the Kolkata Challenge at Royal Calcutta Golf Club course in Kolkata on Friday. The Dane's 11-under 133 put him in sole lead ahead of Scotsman Daniel Young, placed second at 135.

The scores (second round): 133- Rasmus Neergaard-Petersen (Den) (68, 65); 135- Daniel Young (Sco) (69, 66); 137-Veer Ahlawat (67, 70), Wil Besseling (Ned) (68, 69); 138-Charlie Lindh (Swe) (68, 70), Rahil Gangjee (70, 68), Andrew Wilson (Eng) (68, 70), John Parry (Eng) (68, 70), Jamal Hossain (Ban) (70, 68), Dhruv Sheoran (69, 69), Udayan Mane (67, 71).

LIVE TELECAST

NBA: Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema, 8 a.m.

Bangladesh vs Sri Lanka: 1st Test, day 2, FanCode, 9.30 a.m.

Formula One: Australian GP (Qualifying), F1 TV, F1 TV Pro App & FanCode, 10.30 a.m.

IPL: Star Sports 1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 3.30 & 7.30 p.m.

Badminton: Swiss Open, Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 4.30 p.m.

L'affaire Hardik — IPL's first pure football moment

Sunday will tell whether MI's new skipper will be jeered at like it usually happens in 'The Beautiful Game' or warmly embraced for the two wonderful seasons he gave GT

IPL-17

N. Sudarshan
AHMEDABAD

It took more than a decade-and-a-half for the Indian Premier League to have its first pure football moment – a controversial player transfer and unflattering social media commentary surrounding it.

Back in December, Hardik Pandya's move back to his former club Mumbai Indians (MI) after two remarkably successful years as Gujarat Titans (GT) leader sent ripples in the Indian cricketing circles.

For the 30-year-old to then be anointed skipper at MI ahead of Rohit Sharma – captain for a decade and winner of five IPL titles – did not go down well with the Mumbai faithful.

These memories will be rekindled on Sunday at the Narendra Modi Stadium when Hardik, in an MI jersey, walks out for the toss during the season-opener against GT. Will he be jeered at like it usually happens in football or warmly embraced for the two wonderful seasons he gave GT?

Time to sync: Rohit and Hardik will have to move on from the latter's transfer to Mumbai Indians with captain's tag. VIJAY SONEJI

Regardless, the cranking up of the atmosphere is simply because 'The Gentleman's Game' is wired very differently vis-a-vis 'The Beautiful Game'. In football, clubs take prominence and international games punctuate the calendar.

Loyalty is tested every weekend by the club faithful and any misstep is treated with utmost scorn.

Wayne Rooney may have been among England's most important players, but he wasn't spared by England-supporting Liverpool fans because of his boyhood connection to arch-rival Everton.

In cricket, club and national fandoms aren't as independent and emotions do not flow as freely. Subnationalist cults flower, but only insofar as they do not disturb an overarching national identity. On that rare occasion in 2013 when Virat Kohli was booed at the Wankhede Stadium, he tapped into the same sentiment.

"I don't know why they get so worked up," Kohli said. "It feels a bit weird because at the end of the day, you play for India. You come to Bangalore and you see how Indian players are appreciated."

L'affaire Hardik did not drastically disturb this equilibrium but merely introduced the first of the discordant notes. This could be seen in how Hardik's hugging of Rohit during MI's training on Wednesday was perceived. For some it seemed heartfelt, and for some contrived.

On Friday here, Hardik watched as Rohit and Ishan Kishan took turns to face Jasprit Bumrah and Luke Wood. But it was the bear hug that Shubman Gill got from his former captain just ahead of the training session that caught the eye. All's well that ends well? Sunday will tell.

2025 ATP Tour to have expanded events in Canada and Cincinnati

Packed calendar: The London-based ATP Tour will have 60 tournaments in 29 countries next year. GETTY IMAGES

Associated Press
LONDON

The Masters 1000 tournaments in Canada and Cincinnati will increase to 12 days each next season, and events in Dallas, Doha and Munich will be upgraded to the 500 level as part of changes announced on Friday when the ATP Tour released its 2025 calendar for men's tennis.

The calendar reveal comes as tennis is at something of a crossroads, with proposals to alter the way the sport is organized being discussed by its leaders. The London-based ATP will have 60 tournaments in 29 countries next year.

Other changes include moving the Hamburg Open from July to May, shifting the event in Los Cabos from February to July, and switching the Cordoba Open to Mallorca, Spain, as part of the lead-in to Wimbledon.

The Estoril tournament is no longer part of the calendar, but the tour said it will "try to find a solution for the highly regarded event to take place in 2025, and beyond."

The National Bank Open in Canada and the Cincinnati Open follow the Masters 1000 tournaments in Rome, Madrid and Shanghai in stretching to 12 days. That other trio all expanded in 2023. It means that as of next season, seven of the nine ATP Masters events will last nearly two weeks instead of one.

India, Afghanistan play out goalless draw

FIFA WC QUALIFYING

Press Trust of India
ABHA (SAUDI ARABIA)

India played out a goalless draw against Afghanistan after both sides failed to turn their opportunities into goals in a Group A fixture of the 2026 FIFA World Cup Qualifiers here.

It was end-to-end contest in the first half on Thursday night with India coming close to scoring through Manvir Singh on two occasions while the hosts too had their share of chances.

With this result, India climbed to second in Group A with four points from three matches, followed by Kuwait, which is on three from as many games after it lost 3-0 to Qatar earlier in the night.

Chhetri in action against Afghanistan on Thursday night.

The equation was quite clear for both teams.

A win would do either side a world of good.

Afghanistan, following a draw and two losses is fourth in the group.

India and Afghanistan will now shift to Guwahati, where they will face off again on March 26, for their second encounter in the Asian Qualifiers for the FIFA World Cup.

Sindhu and Lakshya bow out; Srikanth, Rajawat in quarters

BADMINTON

Press Trust of India
BASEL

P.V. Sindhu's run at the Swiss Open was cut short by a Japanese teenager, while top Indian male shuttler Lakshya Sen lost to Lee Chia-Hao of Chinese-Taipei in the pre-quarterfinals of the Super 300 tournament here.

Kidambi Srikanth, Priyansh Rajawat and Kiran George won their respective men's singles round-of 16 matches to advance to the quarterfinals late on Thursday night.

Sindhu lost to Japan's 17-year-old junior world champion Tomoka Miyazaki 16-21, 21-19, 21-16, while Lakshya was eliminated by Lee Chia-hao 21-17, 21-15 in just 38 minutes in the round-of 16 contest.

Easy win: Srikanth breezed past top seed Lee Zii Jia. FILE PHOTO: AP

The Indian women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand bowed out after losing to Australia's Setyana Mapasa and Angela Yu on Friday.

The loss will hurt their chances of making the cut for the Paris Olympics later this year.

The results (pre-quarterfinals): Women: Tomoka Miyazaki bt P.V. Sindhu 16-21, 21-19, 21-16.
Doubles: Setyana Mapasa and Angela Yu bt Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopi Chand 21-14, 21-15.
Men: Lee Chia-hao bt Lakshya Sen 21-17, 21-15; K. Srikanth bt Lee Zii Jia 21-61, 21-15; Priyansh Rajawat bt Lei La Xi 21-14, 21-13; Kiran George bt Alex Lanier 18-21, 22-20, 21-18.

Bhartpreet breaks National mark in discus; four meet records tumble

ATHLETICS

Sports Bureau

Punjab's Bhartpreet Singh improved his personal best by two metres as he broke the under-20 men's discus throw National record in the Indian Open throws meet at Patiala on Friday.

The 19-year-old Asian junior champion came up with a 58.18m throw which broke Sachin Singh Dalal's 10-year-old national record. Bhartpreet's previous best (56.18m) had come in the under-20 National meet in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu, last April.

Four meet records were also set in the one-day meet, by Odisha's Vikrant Malik (men's javelin throw), Haryana's Nirbhay Singh (men's discus throw), Punjab's Damneet Singh (men's hammer throw) and Maharashtra's Abha Khatua in women's shot put.

Having a field day: Bhartpreet erased a 10-year-old National mark in discus while improving his personal best. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The results:
Men: Javelin: 1. Vikrant Malik (Odi) 81.68m MR, OR 78.93, 2. Shivpal Singh (UP) 80.47, 3. Parmod (Har) 79.04.
Discus: 1. Nirbhay Singh (Har) 54.89m MR, OR 53.28. 2. Oinam Singh (Man) 53.78 BR, 3. Gagandeep Singh (Pun) 52.49;
Hammer: 1. Damneet Singh (Pun) 65.82m MR, OR 54.80, 2. Gurdev Singh (Pun) 61.87 BR, 3. Mukul UP) 61.61 BR.
Women: Javelin: 1. Jyoti (Har) 51.55m, 2. Karishma Sanil (Kar) 51.02, 3. K.M. Saloni (UP) 50.21;
Discus: 1. Nidhi Rani (Har) 53.57m, 2. Neetika Verma (UP) 51.52, 3. Bhavana Yadav (Del) 50.63.
Shot put: 1. Abha Khatua (Mah) 17.56m MR, or 17.09, 2. Rekha (Har) 14.98, 3. Shiksha (Har) 14.54.
Under-20: Men: Javelin: 1. Dipanshu Sharma (UP) 71.21m, 2. Rohan Yadav (UP) 69.00, 3. Himanshu Mishra (MP) 67.02;
Discus: 1. Bhartpreet Singh (Pun) 58.18m National junior record, OR Sachin Singh Dalal 58.11; 2. Atul (Har) 55.22, 3. Ritik (Chd) 54.94.

Abha... shot put record. FILE PHOTO

Shot put: 1. Anurag Singh Kaler (UP) 19.16m, 2. Siddharth Choudhary (Raj) 18.44, 3. Jaidev Dikka (Del) 18.36.
Hammer: 1. Prateek (Har) 62.75m, 2. Harshit Kumar (UP) 59.93, 3. Aryan (Raj) 54.34.
Women: Javelin: 1. Deepika (Har) 49.75m, 2. Ramyashree Jain (Kar) 46.37, 3. Aakriti Tyagi (Del) 46.24.
Discus: 1. Amanat Kamboj (Pun) 48.20m, 2. Anisha (Del) 48.15, 3. Nistha (Chd) 47.84.
Shot put: 1. Pooja Kumari (Raj) 14.10m, 2. Jaskanwal Kaur (Pun) 13.49, 3. Jashandeep Kaur Pun) 12.14.

Champion men's team clubbed with Indonesia, women in China's group

Press Trust of India
CHENGDU

Reigning champion Indian men's team has been clubbed with heavyweights Indonesia while the women's side was placed alongside mighty China in the Thomas and Uber Cup after the draw for the tournament was conducted here on Friday.

The Indian men's team, which will be defending its maiden title, has been placed in a tricky group.

Besides last year's runner-up and record 14-time winner Indonesia, India has Thailand and England to nullify in Group C.

India became only the sixth country in the world to lift the Thomas Cup in 2022 after stunning Indonesia 3-0 in the final at Bangkok.

In the Uber Cup, the Indian women's badminton team has been drawn in Group A alongside host and the most successful Nation in the tournament's history – 15-time winner China.

The other teams in Group A are Canada and Singapore.

Indian women have reached the semifinals of the Uber Cup thrice in 1957, 2014 and 2016.

The Indian men's team qualified automatically by virtue of being the defending champions while the women made the cut after winning a historic gold medal at the Badminton Asia Team Championships in Malaysia earlier this year.

The tournament will be held from April 27 to May 5 in Chengdu, China.

Ferrari's Leclerc sets the pace during second practice

Verstappen and Sainz follow the Monegasque driver; Norris drives to the best time in the first practice; Albon suffers a crash; Hamilton posts only the 18th fastest lap in FP2 after being ninth quickest earlier

AUSTRALIAN GP

Reuters
MELBOURNE

In the fast lane: Leclerc zipping around the Albert Park Circuit. REUTERS

Charles Leclerc topped the timesheets for Ferrari in the second free practice at the Australian Grand Prix on Friday after Williams driver Alex Albon wrecked his car in the first session with a crash at a familiar turn at Albert Park.

Leclerc posted a flying lap of one minute, 17.277 seconds on soft tyres midway through the second session (FP2), 0.381 seconds quicker than Red Bull's reigning World champion Max Verstappen.

Dutchman Verstappen, bidding for back-to-back wins in Australia and a third victory in succession this season, made a late start after damaging the floor of his car in the earlier session and was unable to do as many laps as planned.

Leclerc's teammate Carlos Sainz was third quickest in FP2 on his return to racing two weeks after appendicitis surgery.

Verstappen's teammate Sergio Perez was eighth fastest in FP2 on a day when most cars struggled for grip on the street circuit. McLaren driver Lando Norris had set the pace (1:18.564) in FP1, which was halted in the last 20 minutes after Albon's crash triggered a red flag.

Albon crashes again

The England-born Thai driver locked up and took a heavy shunt into the barrier at turn six then careened into the opposite barrier to damage both sides of his car, leaving debris on a long section of the track. It came a year after Albon crashed at the same turn on race-day, triggering one of three red flags.

Albon walked away from his car unharmed and apologised on the team radio.

He missed FP2 as his team worked on his car, and Williams, who do not have a spare chassis in Melbourne, may be down a driver for the rest of the race weekend if unable to repair it.

Williams had another fright in FP2 when Logan Sargeant, who recorded the 13th quickest lap, slid off track at the exit of turn 11.

Seven-times World champion Lewis Hamilton posted only the 18th fastest lap in FP2 after being ninth quickest earlier.

Aston Martin's Lance Stroll was fourth in FP2, ahead of team mate Fernando Alonso.

Lopez grapples with history in quest for fifth Olympic gold

WRESTLING

Agence France-Presse
HAVANA

Glory beckons: Lopez, right, is preparing intensely to fight for his fifth consecutive Olympics crown. AFP

In the history of the modern Olympic Games, dating all the way back to 1896, only one athlete, Dutch speedskater Ireen Wust, has managed to win five golds in five successive Games.

Cuban wrestler, Mijain Lopez, however, is looking to match her achievement when he lands in Paris in the summer for what will be his sixth Games, even though he has not competed for over two years.

"I'm going to do it," said the ever-confident Lopez. "The fatigue is there, the body aches are there, so the mind has to be strong, the motivation has to be even stronger," he said, dripping with perspiration after an intense three-hour training session on the mats at the Cerro Pelado high-performance centre in Havana.

If the perspiration and the inspiration do the job in Paris, the 1.98m (6ft 5in) Greco-Roman wrestler will move ahead of such luminaries as the Americans Carl Lewis (long jump), Michael Phelps (swimming, 200m medley) and Al Oerter (discus), Denmark's Paul Elvstrom (sailing) and Japan's Kaori Icho (wrestling), all of whom won individual gold in four different editions of the Games.

Confident

When, just shy of his 39th birthday, the Cuban giant overcame the Georgian Iakobi Kajaia in the 130kg competition in the Covid-delayed Tokyo Games three years ago, it was widely expected to be his swansong. He has not competed since.

But the 41-year-old is determined to grapple again, not just with his opponents but with his own advancing years.

The first battle he has had to fight was with himself, getting his weight stabilised below the required 130kg. He is still a few kilos above but the training sessions are paying off.

Lopez reckons a fifth Olympic title "is an attainable goal". "It's just a question of listening to the coach and trusting all his training plans," he says. "Not to injure myself ... and then I'll go to Paris to fight."

Great journey

Lopez's Olympic journey began in the 120kg class in Athens in 2004 when he had just turned 22. He topped his preliminary pool but went out to the eventual winner Khasan Baroyev in the quarterfinal. The Athens defeat was the only one in 18 Olympic matches for Lopez, who has also been flag-bearer for the Cuban delegation at the last four opening ceremonies.

Four years later in Beijing he turned the tables on Baroyev – who was later stripped of his silver for doping – and repeated that success in London four years later.

Lopez went on to take gold in the 130kg category in Rio in 2016, where his victory over Turkey's Riza Kayaalp was celebrated with a joyous salsa shimmy on the mat, and again in Tokyo.

In Paris, everything will come down to the small details.

"The preparation is going well," he insists. "I think we've achieved exactly what we set out to do.

"We spent two months in training centres in Croatia and Bulgaria, where I was lucky enough to be able to train with top athletes."

SOUTH WESTERN RAILWAY
Tender Notice No: E/GSU/ELE/2023-24/OT/GeM-03 Dated 16.03.2024
The undersigned, on behalf of the President of India, invites E-Tenders for the following work.

Name of the Work	Approx. Value
Hiring of man power for Gati Shakti Unit Bengaluru Division for a period of 24 months. (Bid Number: GEM/2024/B/4784583 Dated: 16-03-2024)	Rs. 6,26,25,375/-

Last date for submission of bids: **Upto 15:00 Hrs. on 06-04-2024**
For details log on: https://gem.gov.in
Deputy Chief Electrical Engineer / Gati Shakti Unit,Bengaluru
PUB/766/AAS/PRB/SWR/2023-24
South Western Railway - SWR SWRRLY SWRRLY

PUBLIC NOTICE
General public are hereby informed that my clients 1. Sri. K. Venkateshwara Raju, and 2. Sri. P. Dhananjayulu Naidu, partners of Sri. Balaji Developers, 3. Sri. Inampudi Kutumba Rao, 4. Sri. K. Venkatewara Raju, 5. Sri. P. Dhananjayulu Naidu and 6. Sri. A. Venkateshwara Rao, Sl. No. 1 and 2 as partners and Sl. 3 to 6 as individual owners were holding property in Sy. No. 106, measuring 17 ½ guntas, and Sy. No. 105, measuring 1 Acre 29 Guntas, situated at Kendatti Village, Vokkaleri Hobli, Kolar Taluk and District, having acquired under registered sale deeds 19.07.2013, vide Doc. No. 2792/2013-14. Their vendors obtained title to the above said properties under registered Sale Deed dated 12.11.1990, Doc. No. 1379/1990-91, Sale Deed dated 28.05.1997, vide Doc. No. 602/1997-98, Sale deed dated 21.08.2002, vide Doc. No. 1942/2002-03 and Certified Copy of the Will dated 29.01.1973, vide Doc.No.39/1972-73. On 15.03.2024, when my clients were traveling from K.R.Puram to Kolar for registration with above said original documents, they lost the above said original sale deeds and certified copy of the will at K.R.Puram and inspite of their best efforts same were not found. My clients sworn to affidavit before the notary regarding lost of originals deeds and also lodged police complaint before the K.R. Puram Police. If any persons found the said documents same may be intimated me and person/s handing over documents will be rewarded suitably.
N.S. SHESHADRI / HARISHA .S, Advocates No.320, 1st Floor, Vasavi Road, K R Puram, Opp. to Govt. College, Bangalore-560 036. Ph: 9448363301 / 9731019876

PUBLIC NOTICE
This is to inform the general public that my client Mr. Rajnish J Khanna is the Assignment Agreement holder executed by Mr. Sameer Pathan & Mrs. Sana Pathan, who were the initial Sale Agreement holders of the Schedule property and Agreement to Sale dated 07/11/2005 executed in favour of Mr. Sameer Pathan and Mrs. Sana Pathan with respect of the Schedule Property is lost while shifting the house by my client and he had filed a complaint in respect of this to Bengaluru City police Unit immediately after coming to his knowledge.
Any person/s having found the same may kindly be returned to the undersigned or to the jurisdictional police or undersigned within 14 days from the date of this publication and if any person misusing the original one shall be prosecuted and if any one entering into any transaction without my client's knowledge with any third party my client shall not be responsible for the same.
SCHEDULE PROPERTY
All that Residential Apartment bearing **No.4087** on **8th Floor of Block No.4** of the development '**Prestige Shanthiniketan**' and measuring **1418 Sq. Feet** of super built up area use and one car parking space in the basement level, along with **1418/6200858th** undivided share in the property bearing Survey Nos.70, 71, 72, 73, 74/1, 74/2, 77all situated in Sadaramangala Village portion of Sy.No,130(P) of Hoodi Village, Krishnarajapuram Hobli, Bangalore East Taluk and bounded by :-
East: Sriram Institute of industrial Research & Industrial Estate, **West:** Internal Road and thereafter remaining portion of the Schedule Property. **North:** Railway Line; **South:** Internal Road and commercial Development
Sd/- **Akhila & Associates, Advocates** No.83, 1st Floor, Cropexium, Service Road, Karthik Nagar, Doddanekkundi, Marathahalli, Bangalore-560037 **Phone: 9741300393**

बनारस रेल इंजन कारखाना, वाराणसी–221004
बिड सं. ई–119/2023–24 दिनांक : 20.03.2024
विश्वजनीन ई–निविदायें
भारत के राष्ट्रपति के लिए एवं उनकी ओर से निम्नलिखित मदों के लिए IREPS के माध्यम से विश्वजनीन निविदायें आमंत्रित की जाती हैं। **क्र.सं.:** 01, **निविदा सं.:** 10231024, **निविदा खुलने की तिथि:** 22/04/2024, **विवरण एवं पार्ट सं.** : पिस्टन रिंग सेट, पार्ट सं. 16030618 **मात्रा** : 6009 सेट्स, **नोट:**– सम्पूर्ण निविदा दस्तावेज की डाउनलोडिंग, एनेस्टमनी एवं विस्तृत जानकारी कृपया वेबसाईट **www.ireps.gov.in** से डाउनलोड किये जा सकते हैं। **शुद्धिपत्र: क्र.सं.:** 02, **बिड सं.:** ई–102, **निविदा सं.:** विश्वजनीन निविदा सं.: 10221616F स्टील करंक शाफ्ट सं. 16140163 **रिविजन:** 2, **सुधार का विवरण:** यह निविदा दिनांक 20/03/24 के स्थान पर दिनांक 22/04/2024 को खुलेगी। **क्र.सं.:** 03, **बिड सं.:** ई–109, **निविदा सं.:** विश्वजनीन निविदा सं.: 10231174A वाल्व टेम्प कोन्ट पार्ट सं. 16241228, **रिविजन:** 1, **सुधार का विवरण:** यह निविदा दिनांक 18/03/24 के स्थान पर दिनांक 22/04/2024 को खुलेगी। **क्र.सं.:** 04, **बिड सं.:** ई–106, **निविदा सं.:** विश्वजनीन निविदा सं.: 10222372D डिटेक्टर असेंबली पार्ट सं. 16360023, **रिविजन:** 2, **सुधार का विवरण:** यह निविदा दिनांक 20/03/24 के स्थान पर दिनांक 29/04/2024 को खुलेगी। **क्र.सं.:** 05, **बिड सं.:** ई–109, **निविदा सं.:** विश्वजनीन निविदा सं.: 10231224 रिपेयर किट फॉर इन्जेक्टर असेंबली पार्ट सं. 16040247, **रिविजन:** 1, **सुधार का विवरण:** यह निविदा दिनांक 18/03/24 के स्थान पर दिनांक 18/04/2024 को खुलेगी। **क्र.सं.:** 06, **बिड सं.:** ई–109, **निविदा सं.:** विश्वजनीन निविदा सं.: 10223100B डिटेक्टर रिपेयर इन्क्लूडस करंक केस पार्ट सं. 16020571, **रिविजन:** 2, **सुधार का विवरण:** यह निविदा दिनांक 28/03/24 के स्थान पर दिनांक 26/04/2024 को खुलेगी। **क्र.सं.:** 07, **बिड सं.:** ई–106, **निविदा सं.:** विश्वजनीन निविदा सं.: 10231521 एकोटिप सुपरस्टैक इन्जेक्टर सं. 16241186, **रिविजन:** 2, **सुधार का विवरण:** यह निविदा दिनांक 29/03/24 के स्थान पर दिनांक 29/04/2024 को खुलेगी। **नोट:**– उपरोक्त सभी निविदाओं की अन्य नियम व शर्तें अपरिवर्तित रहेंगी।
पी.आर./बरेका/एस–126 प्रमुख मुख्य सामग्री प्रबंधक
/blwvaranasi वेबसाइट: blw.indianrailways.gov.in

SOUTH WESTERN RAILWAY
Corrigendum-4 to Tender Notice No. CAO/CN/BNC/EPC/69/2023 Dated : 05-09-2023

Name of the Work	Approx. Value
Construction of New Broad Gauge Line Track Between Jamkhandi Road (incl.) and Jagadal (incl.) for a length of 20.585 Km under Bagalkot - Kudachi New Line Project (142 Km) including Signal & Telecommunication & Electrical Works. **(Tender Ref. No : JAMKHANDIROAD-JAGADAL-EPC)**	Rs. 422,46,37,345/-

Bid Due Date	
Existing	Revised
03-04-2024 (11:00 Hrs)	**03-06-2024 (15:00 Hrs)**

For details log on: www.ireps.gov.in
Deputy Chief Engineer / Construction / Works Bengaluru Cantonment
PUB/767/AAS/PRB/SWR/2023-24
South Western Railway - SWR SWRRLY SWRRLY

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Call our toll-free number **1800 102 1878**
Or write to us at **customercare@thehindu.co.in**
Scan the QR code to register your feedback
THE HINDU businessline. FRONTLINE SPORTSTAR The Hindu Young World THE HINDU

SOUTH WESTERN RAILWAY
Tender Notice No: CAO/CN/BNC/112/2024 Dated : 19-03-2024
The undersigned, on behalf of the President of India, invites E-Tenders for the following work.

Name of the Work	Approx. Value
Construction of Platform, FOB, PF Shelter, Side Drains, Retaining walls and other miscellaneous works for absolute block working system at Shahpur, Sirwal, Biral B and Narboli yards. **(Tender Ref. No. GDG-WD-57)**	Rs. 26,94,20,090/-

Last date for submission of bids: **Upto 15:00 Hrs. on 10-04-2024**
For details log on: www.ireps.gov.in
Deputy Chief Engineer / Construction / Works Bengaluru Cantonment
PUB/769/AAS/PRB/SWR/2023-24
South Western Railway - SWR SWRRLY SWRRLY

JHARKHAND URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT COMPANY LIMITED
(Govt. of Jharkhand Undertaking)
JUIDCO Bhawan, Kutchery Road, Ranchi-834001, Jharkhand.
Ph No.: +91-651-2225878; e-mail Id-; pdt.juidco@gmail.com
CIN: U45200JH2013SGC001752
NIT No: -JUIDCO/NIT/Lohardaga WSS/JMDP/2024/593 Date: 21/03/2024
Tender ID: - 2024_JWB_83924_1 PR No.: - 319899
Corrigendum- 1
All bidders are hereby informed that Corrigendum- 1 is released for tender having details as mentioned above for "**Design, Build and 5 Year Operation Services of Water Supply System for Lohardaga Nagar Parishad Jharkhand**". The bidders are advised to consider the same before submission of their bids against the tender.
Note: Corrigendum- 01 can be referred from the e-tender site of Govt. of Jharkhand i.e., (http://jharkhandtenders.gov.in)
Sd/-
Project Director (Technical)
JUIDCO Ltd., Ranchi
PR.NO.323276 Urban Development and Housing(23-24):D

JHARKHAND BIJLI VITRAN NIGAM LIMITED
(CIN: U40108JH2013SGC001702)
Regd. Office:- Engineering Building, HEC, Dhurwa, Ranchi–834004.
fax # 0651-2400483 e-mail : cesp.jseb@rediffmail.com/gmsp.jbvnl@rediffmail.com
1st Time Extension Notice
Last date of uploading of bid documents, last date of physical submission of tender fee and bid opening date of following tender notice no. is hereby extended as below :-

Sl. No.	NiTs No.	Extended online bid uploading/ submission end date	Last date of online submission of tender fee and EMD	Technical bid opening date and time
1	514/PR/JBVNL/2023-24 ISI Marked ACSR Dog Conductor	04.04.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs	04.04.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.	05.04.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.
2	515/PR/JBVNL/2023-24 ISI Marked ACSR Rabbit Conductor	04.04.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs	04.04.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.	05.04.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.
3	516/PR/JBVNL/2023-24 ISI Marked LT XLPE AB Cable sizes 3Cx50+1x35+1x16	04.04.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs	04.04.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.	05.04.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.
4	517/PR/JBVNL/2023-24 ISI Marked 11 kV XLPE UG Cable 300sqmm	04.04.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs	04.04.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.	05.04.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.
5	518/PR/JBVNL/2023-24 ISI Marked 33 kV XLPE UG Cable 400sqmm	04.04.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs	04.04.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.	05.04.2024 upto 18:00 Hrs.

Further details against the above NIT can be seen on website http:jharkhandtenders.gov.in and may be contacted on Mobile No. 09431135523 / 9430348596/ NIC helpline No. 0651-2400178. Only online payment mode of submission of Tender Fee & EMD will be accepted.
स्वहित एवं राष्ट्र हित में ऊर्जा बचावें। कृपया अपनी शिकयतों को टॉल फ्री नं० 1800 345 6570 पर दर्ज करायें।
Sd/-
General Manager (S&P)
JBVNL
PR No. 320718 PR 323315 Jharkhand Bijlee Vitran Nigam Ltd (23-24)_D

BRUHAT BENGALURU MAHANAGARA PALIKE
Office of the Executive Engineer, Project South, South Zone office complex, 9th Main, 9th Cross, Jayanagara 2nd Block, Bengaluru - 560 011.
No: EEP(S)/KPPP/e-Portal/25/2023-24 Date:22.03.2024
INVITATION FOR TENDER (IFT) (Two Cover System)
(Through **GOK** KPP Portal **https://kppp.karnataka.gov.in** only)
The Executive Engineer, Project South, BBMP, invites tenders on behalf of Additional District Election Officer / Returning Officer, BBMP (South), Bengaluru from eligible Tenderers for Supply / Service work to Loksaba General Election in the below table.

Sl No.	Name of the work
1.	Supply of Videographer and Video Camera Services for Election under the Jurisdiction of ADEO/RO BBMP (South) for Loksabha General Election 2024. **Approx. Amount put to Tender: ₹103.92 Lakhs EMD: ₹1,55,880/-**

Calendar of Events: (1) Tenders must be submitted online through kpp portal on or before **30.03.2024** upto **4:30** pm. (2) Tender Clarification on **30.03.2024** at **10:30** am. (3) Last Date & Time for Receipt of Tenders is **30.03.2024** upto **4:30** pm. (4) Opening of Technical Bid **01.04.2024** at **10:30** am. (5) Financial Bid opening After Technical bid Approval.
Sd/- Executive Engineer Project South

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PERSONAL

ANNOUNCEMENTS

I, SHANIL Nassar, residing in Alif, Pallithekkathil, Vakkom, Trivandrum, Kerala-695308 hereby state that both the names Adam Shanil and Aadam Shanil belongs to my minor son Adam Shanil only vide affidavit dt: 20.03.2024 sworn before Notary Uday Kumar.K, B'luru

CHANGE OF NAME

I, PRAGATI ADEPPA, W/o. Viresh S Adeppa, R/at # 68, 2nd Floor, Kasturi Nagar, Bang 43 have changed my name from PRAGATI KALIWAL to PRAGATI ADEPPA for all my future purposes by affidavit 21–03–2024 sworn before notary Chandrasekar Y R.

I, Laxmi Balenahalli Channegowda W/o, Ashok Pascal Noronha R/o Trifecta Aditya Sollievo, H241, New Temple Rd, Nallurhalli, Whitefield Bangalore - 66 have changed my name to Lakshmi Balenahalli Channegowda for all purposes.

I, MARY Magaleen, D/o Guna Sheela Prabhu P, R/a No.1/1, Muthamma Garden, P S K Naidu Road, Doddikunta, Cox Town, Fraser Town, Bangalore-560005 have changed my name to Mary Magdaline G vide affidavit dt: 22.03.2024 sworn before Notary Meer Hassan, B'lore

I, MARY Jakuleen, D/o Guna Sheela Prabhu P, R/a No.1/1, Muthamma Garden, P S K Naidu Road, Doddikunta, Cox Town, Fraser Town, Bangalore-560005 have changed my name to Mary Jackline G vide affidavit dt: 22.03.2024 sworn before Notary Meer Hassan, B'lore

I, VED Parkash Ahuja, R/at No.205, SLV PR Paradise, 5th Main Cross, Vinayak Nagar, Yelahanka, Bangalore-560064, have changed my name from Ved Parkash Ahuja to Ved Prakash Ahuja vide affidavit before Notary S R Ravikumar, dtd 22-03-24, B'luru

I, JESLIN George, W/o Mariyan Prashanth Pascal, R/o No. 006, Ground Floor, Ds Max Swantra Halleli, TC Palya, KR Puram Halehalli, Bangalore – 560036, have permanently changed my name from Jeslin George to Jeslin George Varokky, vide affidavit dated 22/03/2024, sworn before notary L.Puttaraju, Bangalore.

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It still hurts, haven't been able to get over it: Savita on lost Olympic dream

"The good thing about sports is that you have to forget the past and move forward quickly; that's why I came to play the Nationals," says the India captain

HOCKEY

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

First step to recovery: Savita competed in the FIH Pro League just 10 days after the qualifiers.
FILE PHOTO: BISWARANJAN ROUT

The crying didn't help, living in denial didn't help, what helped was picking up the hockey stick again to make a fresh start.

The 'Great Wall' of Indian women's hockey and captain Savita Punia has been an emotional wreck ever since the team failed to qualify for Paris Olympics, a massive downfall after the superb fourth-place finish in Tokyo just three years ago.

"Good moments in life are not forgotten but neither are the bad ones. Losing the Olympic qualifiers is such a bad moment that we will probably not be able to forget our entire life," the 33-year-old goalkeeper told *'PTI Bhasha'* in an interview.

"I haven't been able to get over it yet," she admitted rather candidly, the disappointment audible through her soft voice.

The heartbreak is now almost two months old. Punia was among those who were seen sobbing when the final hooter went off in the third-place match against Japan, India down by a solitary goal ending its Paris hopes.

"I didn't want to talk about it because it still hurts a lot. I still can't believe that we are not going to Olympics. We were confident and well-prepared, but you cannot predict anything in sports.

"After the qualifiers, we were at home for a week and told all the players that this break is a for them to cry and feel sad as much as they want. Keeping it inside will do no good and it is necessary to vent it out. No one talked about the Olympic qualifiers during this break," she revealed.

The first step in the recovery process was to get back to the game. So, she competed in the FIH Pro League just 10 days after the qualifiers and then came the ongoing Nationals in Pune. She turned up for her state Haryana after a good six years, continuing the healing process.

"The good thing about sports is that you have to forget the past and move forward very quickly. That's why I came to Pune to play the Senior Nationals because hockey is my passion and the more I stay away from the field, the more it will bother me."

"When the team gathered in Bhubaneswar for the Pro League, in the first team meeting we asked how everyone was feeling. It was important for the morale of the youth to remain high. It is also credit to the team that we came together and played well.

"I was constantly thinking that we deserved to be in the Olympics but we don't have the answer as to why we couldn't qualify. The Dutch team was also surprised why we couldn't do it," she recalled wistfully.

"We all did our best and our preparation was very good. It's a lot about luck also. We are more dejected than anyone else."

Aside from getting back to hockey, what helped Punia stay afloat was her reliance on yoga and meditation. "I was not feeling good. Tried a lot but the body was not cooperating. Then I took the help of yoga and pranayam and focused on fitness," she said.

The Indian team will play Pro League matches in Belgium in May-June and the focus will be on fitness. Punia understands that a new core group will take shape after the Nationals and she is prepared for the churning.

"Now a new core group will be formed and some new players will also come. The focus will be on fitness and drag flicks. We have to work on our game continuously," she said.

Punia, who left for the national camp within days of getting married last year to prepare for Olympics, said her husband has also been her rock ever since the qualifiers debacle.

"My husband came after the Olympic qualifiers and gave a lot of encouragement. He said that we could not change what happened but can look ahead and play as long as you want to play. It was a very good thing for me that both my families supported me," she said.

New generation stars leave Wales on brink of another major tournament

EURO PLAYOFFS

Associated Press
CARDIFF

Promising signs: The young team looks set to take Welsh football forward. AP

The post-Gareth Bale era looked particularly daunting for Wales.

After all, how could a principality with a population of 3 million really replace its best ever player, a Real Madrid great, once the most expensive signing in football history? Maybe they needn't have worried.

With Bale having retired after the World Cup in Qatar and another stalwart, Aaron Ramsey, on his last legs, the Welsh needed a new generation to emerge and blossom – and that's what has happened.

On Tuesday, a youthful Wales will look to reach a third straight European Championship tournament when Robert Lewandowski and Poland visit Cardiff City Stadium in one of three playoff finals.

Tellingly, it would be the first time this century that Wales secured qualification for a major tournament without Bale, for so long the team's inspiration.

"It would be just as good as the others, better in some ways," said Wales captain Ben Davies, the old head of the team at age 30. "We don't have Gareth Bale this time. That's a big loss for Wales. But that doesn't mean there's a different feeling within the camp. We are more than confident with the squad we've got."

That was shown in the way Wales swept past Finland with a 4-1 win in the playoff semifinals on Thursday to set up that all-or-nothing encounter with the Poles. Among the scorers was David Brooks, a midfield playmaker just recently given the all-clear after cancer treatment; Brennan Johnson, a forward who is just starting to establish himself at Tottenham, one of the top teams in the Premier League; and Dan James, a winger who is rebuilding his career at second-tier leader Leeds after a brief spell at Manchester United.

"We're in a different position because we've got a younger squad, a fitter squad, we've got players who are playing regularly," Wales coach Page said.

The age profile of Wales' squad must excite its fans. Central midfielder Jordan James, 19, is highly rated and plays for second-tier Birmingham. Johnson is only 22 and joined Spurs for more than $60 million last year. Harry Wilson, 26, is starting to blossom at Fulham. Then there's Lewis Koumas, an 18-year-old who scored on his debut for Liverpool last month and isn't in Page's squad yet.

Wales has had many big-name players down the years – Ryan Giggs, Ian Rush, Mark Hughes, Neville Southall and most recently Bale – but not necessarily the backup to support them. With this latest crop, it might prove to be the opposite.

Flintoff in England's backroom staff for T20 World Cup

Press Trust of India
LONDON

Andrew Flintoff has been added to England's backroom staff for the upcoming T20 World Cup, and ECB managing director Rob Key viewed it as a portend to the former all-rounder's potential candidacy to the team's head coach role.

Flintoff will coach Northern Superchargers in The Hundred this season and will also be involved with the England team during its four-match T20I series against Pakistan ahead of the ICC showpiece.

"Without question, I think he would be an excellent head coach. He will be a worthy candidate going forward. When that time comes and whoever is in this job, and it might be outside of my time, they would be stupid not to look at him," Key told *Telegraph*.

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